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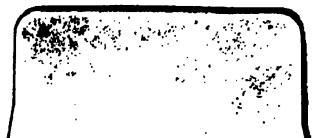
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ROLAND YORKE.

A Novel.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD,
AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," "THE CHANNINGS," ETC.

"And Deering's Woods are fresh and fair,
And with joy that is almost pain
My heart goes back to wander there,
And among the dreams of the days that were
I find my lost youth again,
And the strange and beautiful song,
The groves are repeating it still:
'A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.'"
LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	IN THE MOONLIGHT	I
II.	UP TO THE MONDAY EVENING	21
III.	BEFORE THE CORONER	42
IV.	GOING HOME WITH THE NEWS	70
V.	MR. BUTTERBY IN PRIVATE LIFE	89
VI.	GODFREY PITMAN	III

PART THE SECOND.

THE STORY.

VII.	IN THE OFFICE	134
VIII.	ARRIVAL FROM PORT NATAL	156
IX.	UNEXPECTED MEETINGS	177
X.	GOING INTO SOCIETY	211
XI.	DAY DREAMS	240
XII.	COMMOTION IN THE OFFICE OF GREATOREX AND GREATOREX	265
XIII.	TAKING THE PLACE OF JELF	287

ROLAND YORKE.

PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

THE scene of this Prologue to the story about to be written was a certain cathedral-town, of which most of you have heard before, and the time close upon midnight.

It was a warm night at the beginning of March. The air was calm and still ; the bright moon was shedding her pure light with unusual brilliancy on the city, lying direct underneath her beams. On the pinnacles of the time-honoured cathedral; on the church-spire, whose tapering height has made itself a name ; on the clustering roofs of houses ; on the trees of what people are pleased to call the Park ; on the river, silently winding its course along beneath the city walls ; and on

the white pavement of its streets : all were steeped in the soft and beautiful light of the Queen of Night.

Surely at that late hour people ought to have been asleep in their beds, and the town hushed to silence ! Not so. A vast number of men—and women too, for the matter of that—were awake and abroad. At least, it looked a good number, stealing quietly in one direction along the principal street. A few persons, comparatively speaking, assembled together by daylight, will look like a crowd at night. They went along for the most part in silence, one group glancing round at another, and being glanced at, back again : whether drawn out by curiosity, by sympathy, by example, all seemed very much as if they were half ashamed to be seen there.

Straight through the town, past the new law-courts, past the squares and the good houses built in more recent years, past the pavements and the worn highway, telling of a city's bustle, into the open country, to where a churchyard abuts upon a side-road. A rural, not much frequented churchyard, dotted with old graves, its small, grey church standing in the middle. People were not buried there now. On one side of the churchyard, open to the side way, the boundary hedge had

disappeared, partly through neglect. The entrance was on the other side, facing the city ; and where was the use of raising up again the trodden-down hedge, destroyed gradually and in process of time by boys and girls at play ? So, at least, argued the authorities—when they argued about it at all.

People were not buried there now : and yet a grave was being dug. At the remotest corner of this open side of the churchyard, so close to the consecrated ground that you could scarcely tell whether they were on it or off it, two men with torches were working at the nearly finished, shallow, hastily-made grave. A pathway, made perhaps of custom more than of plan, led right over it into the churchyard—if any careless person chose to enter it by so unorthodox a route—and the common side-road, wide enough to admit of carts and other vehicles, crossed it on the exact spot where the grave was being dug. So that a spectator might have said the grave's destined occupant was to lie in a cross-road.

Up to this spot came the groups, winding round the front hedge silently, save from that inevitable hum which attends a number, their footsteps grating and shuffling on the still air. That there was some kind of *reverence* attaching to the feeling in general, was proved by the

absence of all jokes and light words ; it may be almost said by the absence of conversation altogether, for what little they said was spoken in whispers. The open space beyond the grave was a kind of common, stretching out into the country, so that there was room and to spare for these people to congregate around, without pressing inconveniently on the sides of the shallow grave. Not but what every soul went close to give a look in, taking a longer or shorter time in the gaze as curiosity was slow or quick to satisfy itself.

The men threw out the last spadeful, patted the sides well, and ascended to the level of earth. Not a minute too soon. As they stamped their feet, like men who have been in a cramped position, and put their tools away back, the clock of the old grey church struck twelve. It was a loud striker at all times ; it sounded like a gong in the stillness of the night, and a movement ran through the startled spectators.

With the first stroke of the clock there came up a wayfarer. Some traveller who had missed his train at Bromsgrove, and had to walk the distance. He advanced with a jaunty though somewhat tired step along the highway, and did not discern the crowd until close upon them, for the road wound just

there. To say that he was astonished would be saying little. He stood still, and stared, and rubbed his eyes, almost questioning whether the unusual scene could be real.

“What on earth’s the matter?” demanded he of some one near him. “What does it all mean?”

The man addressed turned at the question, and recognised the speaker for Mr. Richard Jones, an inhabitant of the town. At least he was nearly sure it was he, but he knew him by sight but slightly. If it was Mr. Jones, why this same crowd and commotion had to do with him, in one sense of the word. Its cause had a great deal to do with his home.

“Can’t you answer a body?” continued Mr. Jones, finding he got no reply.

“Hush!” breathed the other man. “Look there.”

Along the middle of the turnpike-road, on their way from the city, came eight men with measured and even tread, bearing a coffin on their shoulders. It was covered with what looked like a black cloth shawl, whose woollen fringe was clearly discernible in the moonlight. Mr. Jones had halted at the turning up to the churchyard, where he first saw the assembly of people; consequently the men

bearing the coffin, whose heavy tread and otherwise silent presence seemed to exhale a kind of unpleasant thrill, passed round by Mr. Jones, nearly touching him.

“What *is* it?” he repeated in a few seconds, nearly wild to have his understanding enlightened.

“Don’t you see what it is?—a coffin. It’s going to be buried in that there cross grave up yonder.”

“But who *is* in the coffin?”

“A gentleman who died by his own hand. The jury brought it in self-murder, and so he’s got to be put away without burial service.”

“Lawk a mercy!” exclaimed Mr. Jones, who though a light, shallow, unstable man, given to make impromptu excursions from his home and wife, and to spend too much money in doing it, was not on the whole a bad-hearted one. “Poor gentleman! Who *was* it?”

“One of them law men in wigs that come in to the ‘sizes.’”

Mr. Jones might have asked more but for two reasons. The first was, that his neighbour moved away in the wake of those who were beginning to press forward to see as much as they could get to see of the closing ceremony; the next was, that in a young wo-

man who just then walked past him, he recognised his wife's sister. Again Mr. Jones rubbed his eyes, mentally questioning whether this second vision might be real. For she, Miss Rye, was a steady, good, superior young woman, not at all likely to come out of her home at midnight after a sight of any sort, whether it might be a burying or a wedding. Mr. Jones really doubted whether his sight and the moonlight had not played him false. The shortest way to solve this doubt would have been to accost the young woman, but while he had been wondering, she disappeared. In truth it was Miss Rye, and she had followed the coffin from whence it was brought, as a vast many more had followed it. Not mixing with them ; walking apart and alone close to the houses, in the deep shade cast by their walls. She was a comely young woman of about seven-and-twenty, tall and fair, with steady blue eyes, good features, and a sensible countenance. In deep mourning for her mother, she wore on this night a black merino dress, soft and fine, and a black shawl trimmed with crape, that she held closely round her. But she had disappeared ; and amidst so many Mr. Jones thought it would be useless to go looking for her.

A certain official personage or two, perhaps

deputies from the coroner, or from the parish, or from the undertaker furnishing the coffin and the two sets of bearers—who can tell?—whose mission it was to see the appointed proceedings carried out, cleared by their hands and gestures a space around the grave. The people fell back obediently. They pressed and elbowed each other no doubt, and grumbled at others crushing them; but they kept themselves back in their places. A small knot, gentlemen evidently, and probably friends of the deceased, were allowed to approach the grave. The grave-diggers stood near, holding the torches. But for those flaring torches, the crowd would have seen better: they saw well enough, however, in the bright moonlight.

In the churchyard, having taken up his station there behind an upright tombstone, where tombstones were thick, stood an officer connected with the police. He was in plain clothes—in fact, nobody remembered to have seen him in other ones—and had come out to-night not officially but to gratify himself personally. Ensconced behind the stone, away from everybody, he could look on at leisure through its upper fretwork and take his own observations, not only of the ceremony about to be performed, but of those who were attending

it. He was a middle-sized, spare man, with a pale face, deeply sunk green eyes, that had a habit of looking steadily at people, and a small, sharp, turned-up nose. Silent by nature and by habit, he imparted the idea of possessing a vast amount of astute keenness as a detector of crime : in his own opinion he had not in that respect an equal. Nobody could discern him, looking on, and he did not intend they should.

Amidst a dead silence, save for the creaking of the cords, amidst a shiver of sympathy, of pity, of awful thoughts from a great many of the spectators, the black covering was thrown aside and the coffin was lowered. There was a general lifting off of hats ; a pause ; and then a rush. One in the front rank—a fat woman, who had fought for her place—stepped forward in her irrepressible curiosity to take a last look inside the grave ; another followed her ; the movement was contagious, and there was a commotion. Upon which the men holding the torches swept them round ; it threw out the flame rather dangerously, and the rushers drew back again with a half cry. Not quite all. A few, more adventurous than the rest, slipped round to the safer side, and were in time to read the inscription on the lid :

“JOHN OLLIVERA.

AGED 28.”

Short enough, and simple enough, for the sad death. Only a moment after the cords were drawn away did it remain visible; for the gravediggers, flinging their torches aside, threw in the earth, spadeful upon spadeful, and covered it up from sight.

The shallow grave was soon filled in; the gravediggers flattened it down level with spades and feet: no ceremony accorded, you see, to such an end as this poor man had made. Before it was quite accomplished, those officially connected with the burial, or with the buried, left the ground and departed. Not so the mob of people: they stayed to see the last; and would have stayed had it been until morning light. And they talked freely now, one with another, but were orderly and subdued still.

Mr. Jones stayed. He had not mixed with the people, but stood apart in the churchyard, under the shade of the great yew-tree. Soon he began to move away, and came unexpectedly upon the detective officer standing yet behind the gravestone. Mr. Jones halted in surprise.

“ Halloo !” cried he. “ Mr. Butterby !”

“ Just look at them idiots !” rejoined Mr.

Butterby, with marked composure, as if he had seen Richard Jones from the first, and expected the address. "So *you* are back!" he added, turning his head sharply on the traveller.

"I come in from Bromsgrove on my legs; missed the last train there," said Mr. Jones, rather addicted to a free-and-easy kind of grammar in private life: as indeed was the renowned gentleman he spoke to. "When I got past the last turning and see these here folks, I thought the world must be gone mad."

"Did you come back on account of it?" asked Mr. Butterby. "Did they write for you?"

"On account of what? As to writing for me, they'd be clever to do that, seeing I left 'em no address to write to. I have been going about from place to place; to-day there, to-morrow yonder."

"On account of *that*," answered the detective, nodding his head in the direction of the grave, to which the men were then giving the last finishing strokes and treads of flattening.

To Mr. Jones's ear there was something so obscure in the words that he only stared at their speaker, almost wondering whether the grave officer had condescended to a joke.

“I don’t understand you, sir.”

Mr. Butterby saw at once how the matter stood: that Dicky Jones—the familiar title mostly accorded him in the city—was ignorant of recent events.

“The poor unfortunate man just put in there, Jones”—with another nod to the grave—“was Mr. Ollivera, the counsel.”

“Mr. Ollivera!” exclaimed the startled Jones.

“And he took his life away at your house.”

“Lawk a mercy!” cried Mr. Jones, repeating his favourite expression, one he was addicted to when overwhelmed with surprise.
“Whatever did he do it for?”

“Ah, that’s just what we can’t tell. Perhaps he didn’t know himself what.”

“How was it, sir? Poison?”

“Shot himself with his own pistol,” briefly responded the officer.

“And did it knowingly?—intentional?”

“Intentional for sure, or he’d not have been put in there to-night. They couldn’t have buried a dog with much less ceremony.”

“Well, I never knew such a thing as this,” cried Mr. Jones, scarcely taking in the news yet. “When I went away Mr. Ollivera hadn’t come; he was expected; and my wife—Halloo!”

The cause of the concluding exclamation was a new surprise, as great as any the speaker had met with yet. Mr. Butterby, his keen eyes strained forward from their enclosed depths, touched him on the arm with authority to enjoin silence.

The young woman—it would be no offence against taste to call her a lady, with her good looks, her good manners, her usually calm demeanour—whom Mr. Jones had recognised as his wife's sister, had come forward to the grave. Kneeling down, she bent her face in her hands, perhaps praying; then lifted it, rose, and seemed about to address the crowd. Her hands were clasped and raised before her; her bonnet had fallen back from her face and her bright flaxen hair.

“It *is* Alletha Rye, isn't it, sir?” he dubiously cried.

“Hold your noise!” said Mr. Butterby.

“I think it would be a wicked thing to let you disperse this night with a false belief on your minds,” began Miss Rye, her clear voice sounding quite loud and distinct in the hushed silence. “Wicked in the sight of God; unkind and unjust to the dead. Listen to my words, please, all you who hear me. I believe that a dreadful injury has been thrown upon Mr. Ollivera's memory; I solemnly be-

lieve that he *did not die by his own hand.*
Heaven hears me assert it."

The solemn tone, the strange words, the fair appearance of the young woman, with her good and refined face, deathly pale now, and the moonlight playing on her light hair, awed the listeners into something like statues. The silence continued unbroken until Miss Rye moved away, which she did at once and with a rather quick step in the direction of the road, pulling her bonnet on her head as she went, drawing her shawl round her. Even Mr. Jones made neither sound nor movement until she had disappeared, so entire was his astonishment.

"Was there ever heard the like of that?" he exclaimed, when he at length drew breath.
"Do you think she's off her head, sir?"

He received no answer, and turned to look at Mr. Butterby. That gentleman had his note-book out, and was pencilling something down in it by moonlight.

"I never see such a start as this—take it for all in all," continued Mr. Jones to himself and the air, thus thrown upon his own companionship.

"And I'd not swear that you've seen the last of it," remarked Mr. Butterby, closing his note-case with a click.

“Well, sir, good-night to you,” concluded Mr. Jones. “I must make my way home afore the house is locked up, or I shall get a wigging from my wife. Sure to get that in any case, now this has happened,” he continued, ruefully. “She’ll say I’m always away when I’m wanted at home in particular.”

He went lightly enough over the graves to the opposite and more frequented side of the churchyard, thus avoiding the assemblage; and took his departure. There being nothing more to see, the people began to take theirs. Having gazed their fill at the grave—just as if the silent, undemonstrative earth could give them back a response—they slowly made their way down the side-path to the high road, and turned towards the city, one group after another.

By one o’clock the last straggler had gone, and Mr. Butterby came forth from his post behind the sheltering gravestone. He had his reasons, perhaps, for remaining behind the rest, and for wishing to walk home alone.

However that might be, he gave their progress a good margin of space, for it was ten minutes past one when he turned out of the churchyard. He had just gained the houses, when he saw before him a small knot of people emerge from a side-turning, as if they had

not taken the direct route in coming from the heart of the city. Mr. Butterby recognised one or two of them, and whisked into a friendly doorway until they had passed by.

Letting them get on well ahead, he turned back and followed in their wake. That they were on their way to the grave, appeared evident: and the acute officer wondered why. A thought crossed him that possibly they might be about to take up what had been laid there.

He went into the churchyard by the front gate, and made his way cautiously across it, keeping under the shadow of the grey church walls. Thence, stooping as he crossed the open ground, and dodging behind first one grave then another, he took up his former position against the high stone. They were at the grave now, and he began to deliberate whether, if his thought should prove correct, he should or should not officially interrupt proceedings. Getting his eyes to the open fretwork of the stone, Mr. Butterby looked out. And what he saw struck him with a surprise equal to any recently exhibited by Mr. Jones: he, the experienced police official, who knew the world so thoroughly as to be surprised at little or nothing.

Standing at the head of the grave was a

clergyman in his surplice and hood. Four men were grouped around him, one of whom held a lantern so that its light fell upon the clergyman's book. He was beginning to read the burial service. They stood with bowed heads, their hats off. The night had grown cold, but Mr. Butterby took off his.

“I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

The solemn words, doubly solemn at that time and place, came distinctly to the official ears. Perhaps in all the times he had heard them during his whole life—many and many that it had been—they had never so impressed him. But habit is strong ; and Mr. Butterby found himself taking observations ere the psalm had well commenced, even while he was noticing how heartily the alternate verses were given by the spectators.

Three of them around the grave he recognised ; the other one and the clergyman he did not. Of those three, one was a tall fine man of forty years, Kene, the barrister ; the next was a cousin of the deceased, Frank Greatorex, whom Mr. Butterby only knew by

seeing him in the inquest-room, where he tendered some slight evidence ; the third was a gentleman of the city. Neither the clergyman nor the one who held the light did Mr. Butterby remember to have seen before. The elder and other cousin of the deceased was not present, though Mr. Butterby looked for him ; he had been the principal witness on the inquest—Mr. Bede Greatorex.

The officer could but notice also how singularly solemn, slow, and impressive was the clergyman's voice as he read those portions of the service that relate more particularly to the deceased and the faith in which he has died. “In sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life.” He almost made a pause between each word, as if he would impress on his hearers that it was his own belief the deceased had so died. And again, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.” And towards the end, in the collect, in the beseeching prayer that when we depart this life we may rest in Christ, “as our hope is this our brother doth.” It was not to be mistaken that the clergyman, at least, held firm faith in the absence of guilt of the deceased in regard to his own death. As indeed the reading of the service over him proved.

With the Amen of the concluding bene-

diction, there ensued a silence ; every head was bowed in prayer. The clergyman was the first to look up. He waited until the rest did.

“Allow me to say a word ere we depart,” he began then, in a low tone ; which nevertheless quick-eared Mr. Butterby distinctly caught. “From the bottom of my heart, I believe a foul deed of murder to have been committed on my good and dear brother. It shall be the business of my life to endeavour to bring it to light, to clear his name from the cruel stain pronounced upon it ; and my whole time, apart from what must be spent in my appointed duties, shall be devoted to this end. So help me, Heaven !”

“Amen !” responded the young man who stood by Mr. Kene.

“So ! he’s the deceased man’s brother,” was Mr. Butterby’s comment on the clergyman, as he saw him take off his surplice and roll it up.

Blowing out the light in the lantern, they silently took their departure. Mr. Butterby watched them away, and then finally took his, his mind in full work.

“Just the same thing that the girl, Alletha Rye, said ! It’s odd. I didn’t see any doubt about the business : in spite of what Kene

said at the inquest ; neither did the coroner ; and I'm sure the jury didn't. Dicky Jones was right, though. Take it for all in all, it's the queerest start we've had in this town for many a day."

CHAPTER II.

UP TO THE MONDAY EVENING.

ON the Saturday previous to the events recorded in the last chapter, the cathedral city had been the scene of unusual bustle. The judges came in from Oxford to hold the Spring Assize, bringing in their wake the customary multiplicity of followers: attendants, officers, barristers, and others. Some of the witnesses in the different cases to be tried, civil and criminal, also came in that day, to remain until they should be wanted the following week: so that the town was full.

Amidst the barristers who arrived was Mr. Ollivera. He was a young man; and it was only the second time he had come on circuit. After leaving college he had travelled a good deal, and also sojourned in different foreign countries, acquiring legal experience, and did not take up his profession at home as early as some do. A fresh-coloured, pleasing, bright

looking man was he, his curly hair of a light auburn, his eyes blue, his figure elastic and of middle height. All the world liked John Ollivera. He was essentially of a practical nature, of sound sense, of pure mind and habits, holding a reverence for all things holy; and in every respect just the last man who could have been suspected of a tendency to lay violent hands on himself.

He had written to secure his former lodgings at Mr. Jones's in High Street, and proceeded to them at once on arriving at the station. It was the third time he had lodged there. At the previous assizes in July he had gone there first: and the whole of the month of October, during the long vacation, he had been there again, having, as people supposed, taken a liking to the town. So that this was the third time.

He got in between six and seven on the Saturday evening. Ordered tea and two mutton chops, which were got for him at once; and then went out to pay a visit to a lady who lived within the precincts of the cathedral. She was a widow; her husband, Colonel Joliffe, having died about a year before, leaving her with a slender income and three expensive daughters. During the colonel's lifetime they had lived in good style, about

two miles from the town ; but a great part of his means died with him, and Mrs. Joliffe then took a small house in the city and had to retrench in all ways. Which was a terrible mortification to the young ladies.

To this lady's house Mr. Ollivera took his way when his frugal tea-dinner was over. He spent a couple of hours with them, and then returned to his rooms and got out his law papers, over which he remained until twelve o'clock, when he went to bed. He occupied the drawing-room, which was on the first floor over the shop, and looked to the street ; and the bedroom behind it. On the following day, Sunday, he attended early prayers in the cathedral at eight o'clock, staying to partake of the Sacrament, and also the later service at eleven, when the judges and corporation were present. In the afternoon he attended the cathedral again, going to it with the Miss Joliffes ; dined at home at five, which was also Mrs. Joliffe's dinner hour, and spent the rest of the evening at her house. Mrs. Jones, his landlady, who had a vast amount of shrewd observation—and a shrewd tongue too on occasions, as well as a sharp one—gave it as her opinion that he must be courting one of the Miss Joliffes. He had been with them a little in his few days sojourn at the July assizes, and

a great deal with them during his stay in October.

On Monday morning the trials commenced, and Mr. Ollivera, though he had no cause on, was in court a great portion of the day. He left it in the afternoon, telling Mr. Kene that he had an appointment for half-past three, a disagreeable commission that had been entrusted to him, he added, and must go and keep it. About half-past four he appeared 'at his rooms ; Mrs. Jones met him in the hall, and spoke to him as he went up stairs. When his dinner was sent up at five, the maid found him buried in a heap of law papers. Hastily clearing a space at one end of the table, he told her to put the dinner there. In less than half an hour the bell was rung for the things to be taken away, and Mr. Ollivera was then bending over his papers again.

The papers no doubt related to a cause in which he was to appear the following day. It was a civil action, touching some property in which Mrs. Joliffe was remotely though not actively interested. The London solicitors were the good old firm of Greatorex and Greatorex ; Mr. Ollivera was a relative of the house ; nephew of old Mr. Greatorex, in fact ; and to him had been confided the advocacy of

the cause. The name of the local solicitor it does not signify to mention. It was not a very important cause: but a new barrister thinks all his causes important, and Mr. Ollivera was an earnest, painstaking man, sparing himself no trouble that could conduce to success. He had declined a proffered dinner engagement for that evening, but accepted an invitation for the next. So much was known of his movements up to the Monday evening.

On that same evening, Mr. Bede Greatorex arrived at the station by the six o'clock train from London; took a fly, and was driven to the Star and Garter Hotel. He was the son of old Mr. Greatorex, and the second partner in the firm. His journey down had reference to the next day's action: something new had unexpectedly arisen; some slight information been gained of a favourable nature, and Mr. Greatorex, senior, had despatched his son to confer with Mr. Ollivera in preference to writing or telegraphing. Bede Greatorex was nothing loth, and entered on his flying journey with high good humour, intending to be back in London by the following mid-day. He was a tall, fine-looking man, in face not unlike Mr. Ollivera, except that his hair and eyes were dark, and his complexion a clear,

pale olive ; his age about thirty-four. The cousins were cordial friends.

On arriving at the Star and Garter he declined refreshment then, having taken an early dinner before leaving town, and asked to be directed to Mr. Ollivera's lodgings in High Street : which was readily done, High Street being in a direct line with the hotel. Mr. Bede Greatorex gained the house, and found it to be one of commodious proportions, the lower part occupied as a hosier's shop, whose windows were of plate glass. Over the door in the middle was inscribed "Richard Jones, hosier and patent shirt-front maker." There was a side entrance, wide and rather handsome ; the house altogether being a good one. Ringing at the side bell, he enquired of the answering servant for Mr. Ollivera, and was at once shown up to him.

Mr. Ollivera was seated at the table, his back to the door. The papers he had been engaged upon were neatly stacked now, as if done with ; he appeared to be writing a note ; and a pistol lay at his elbow. All this was shown both to Mr. Bede Greatorex and the maid, by the bright flame of the moderator lamp, then lighted.

"Well, John !" cried the visitor, in a gay,

laughing tone, before the girl could speak.
“Don’t be surprised at seeing me.”

Mr. Ollivera turned round at the voice and evidently was surprised: surprised and pleased.

“Why, Bede!” he cried, starting up. “I’d as soon have expected to see a ghost.”

They shook hands heartily, and Mr. Bede Greatorex sat down. The maid, to save coming up again to ask, took the opportunity of inquiring when Mr. Ollivera would like tea; and was answered that he might not want any; if he did, he’d ring: he might be going out. As the servant shut the door she heard the visitor begin to explain his errand, and that his father had sent him in preference to writing. Her ears were always full of curiosity.

In about an hour’s time, Mr. Bede Greatorex departed. A young man belonging to the house, Alfred Jones, who happened to be passing up the stairs when Mr. Greatorex was quitting the drawing-room, heard that gentleman make an appointment with Mr. Ollivera for the morning.

Mr. Bede Greatorex walked back to the hotel, ordered a fire made in his bedroom against night, took a glass of brandy-and-

water, for he felt cold, washed the travelling dust off his face and hands, which he had not done before, had his coat brushed, and went out again. It was nine o'clock then, and he bent his steps quickly towards the cathedral to call on Mrs. Joliffe, having to inquire the way. It took him through High Street again, and as he passed his cousin's lodgings, the same servant who had shown him in was standing at the front-door, recognized him and dropped a curtsey.

In the drawing-room with Mrs. Joliffe were her three daughters, Louisa, Clare, and Mary ; some three or four friends were also assembled. They were astonished to see Mr. Bede Greatorex : none of them knew him well, except Louisa, who had paid a long visit to his father's house the previous year. She changed colour when he was announced : and it may have been that his voice took a tenderer tone as it addressed her ; his hand lingered longer in clasping hers than it need have done. She was an excessively fashionable young lady : not very young, perhaps six or seven-and-twenty : and if Bede Greatorex coveted her for a wife it was to be hoped his pockets were well lined. He spoke just a word to Mrs. Joliffe of having come down on a mission to Mr. Ollivera ; not stating explicitly what it

was ; and said he was going back home in the morning.

“ We are expecting Mr. Ollivera here to-night,” observed Mrs. Joliffe. “ He is late.”

“ Are you ?” was the reply of Mr. Greatorex. “ John said he might be going out, I remember, but I did not know it was to your house. Don’t make too sure of him, Mrs. Joliffe. He seemed idle, and complained of headache.”

“ I suppose he is busy,” remarked Mrs. Joliffe. “ All you law people are busy at assize time.”

“ Louisa, is it as it should be between us ?” whispered Bede Greatorex, in an opportunity that occurred when they were alone near the piano.

“ Don’t be silly, Mr. Greatorex,” was the answer.

“ Silly !”

She bent her head, not speaking.

“ What do you mean, Louisa ? Our engagement was entered upon deliberately : you gave me every hope. You cannot play with me now. Speak, Louisa.”

He had taken possession of her hand, and was keeping her before him ; his dark eyes, gleaming with their doubt and love, looked straight into hers.

“What?” she faintly asked. “Why do you question it?”

“Because your manner is strange: you have avoided me ever since I came in.”

“The surprise was so great.”

“Surely a pleasant surprise. I intended it as such. Do you suppose I should have cared to come down on this business to Mr. Ollivera, when writing would have answered every purpose? No: I came to see you. And to learn why——”

“Not now. Don’t you see mamma is looking at me?”

“And what though she is? I should have liked to speak to your mother to-night, but for——”

“Not to-night. I pray you not to-night. Take another opportunity.”

The words reassured him.

“Then, Louisa, it is all right between us.”

“Yes, yes, of course it is. You offended me, Bede, last January, and I—I have been vexed. I’ll write to you as soon as you get back home, and explain everything.”

He pressed her hand with a lingering touch, and then released it. There was nothing in the wide world so coveted by Bede Greatorex as that false hand of hers: as many things, fair outside, false within, are coveted by us

poor mortals, blind at the best. But Miss Joliffe looked half scared as she left him for a safer part of the room ; her eyes and manner were alike restless. Bede followed her, and they were talking together at intervals in an under tone during the rest of the evening, Louisa being evidently ill at ease, but striving to conceal it.

At a quarter to eleven Mr. Bede Greatorex took his departure. In passing up High Street, his cousin's lodgings were on the opposite side of the way. He momentarily halted and stepped off the pavement as if he would have crossed to go in, and then hesitated, for the sitting-room was in darkness.

“ The light's out : he's gone to bed, I dare say,” said Mr. Greatorex, speaking aloud. “ No good to disturb him.” And a tradesman, who happened to be fastening his side-door and had got it about an inch open, overheard the words, Mr. Greatorex having doubtless been quite unaware that he spoke to an auditor.

Towards the top of High Street he met Mr. Kene, the barrister. The latter, after expressing some surprise at seeing him, and assuming he had come direct from Mr. Ollivera's, asked whether the latter was in.

"In, and in bed," replied Mr. Greatorex.

"Indeed! Why, it's not eleven o'clock."

"At any rate, there's no light in his room, or I should have gone up. He complained of headache: perhaps he has gone to bed early to sleep it off."

"I want to see him particularly," said the barrister. "Are you sure he is in bed?"

"You can go and ascertain, Kene. Ring the people of the house up, should they have gone to bed too. I could see no light anywhere."

Mr. Kene did not care to ring people up, and decided to leave his business with Mr. Ollivera until the morning. He had been dining with some fellows, he said, and had no idea how the time was running on. Linking his arm within that of Bede Greatorex, they walked together to the Star, and there parted. Mr. Greatorex went up at once to his chamber, stirred the fire into a blaze, rang for the waiter, and ordered another glass of hot brandy-and-water.

"I think I must have taken cold," he observed to the man when it was brought to him. "There has been a chill upon me ever since I came here."

"Nothing more likely, sir," returned the

waiter. "Them trains are such draughty things."

However, Mr. Greatorex hoped he should be all right in the morning. He gave directions to be called at a quarter before eight, and the night wore on.

Some time before that hour chimed out from the cathedral clock, when the morning had come, he found himself aroused by a knocking at his door. A waiter, speaking from the outside, said that something had happened to Mr. Ollivera. Mr. Bede Greatorex, thinking the words odd, and not best pleased to be thus summarily disturbed, possibly from dreams of Louisa Joliffe, called out from the downy pillow (in rather a cross tone, it must be confessed) to know *what* had happened to Mr. Ollivera: and was answered that he was dead.

Springing out of bed, and dressing himself quickly, Bede Greatorex went down stairs, and found that Kene, who had brought the news, was gone again, leaving word that he had gone back to High Street. Mr. Greatorex hastened to follow him.

The tale to be told was very singular, very sad, and Bede Greatorex could not help shivering as he heard it. His cold was upon him still. It appeared that nothing more had been

seen or heard of Mr. Ollivera after Mr. Greatorex left him the previous evening. Mrs. Jones, the mistress of the house, had gone out at seven, when the shop closed, to sit by the bedside of a dying relative; her sister, Miss Rye, was also out; the maid left in charge, the only servant the house kept, had taken the opportunity to spend *her* time in the street; standing now at her own door, now at other doors half a score yards off, as she could get neighbours' servants to gossip with. About half-past ten it occurred to the maid that she might as well go up and enquire if Mr. Ollivera wanted anything: perhaps the fact of his not having rung at all struck her as singular. She knew he had not gone out, or she must have seen him, for she had contrived to keep a tolerably steady look-out on the street-door, however far she had wandered from it. Up she went, knocked at the door, got no answer, opened it, saw that the room was in darkness, and regarded it as a sure proof that Mr. Ollivera had left the room for the night, for he never put the lamp out in any other case.

“He’s gone to bed early to-night,” thought the girl, shutting the door again. “I hope to goodness he didn’t ring, and me not hear it. Wouldn’t missis fly out at me!”

And when Mrs. Jones came in, as she did soon after the girl got down stairs again, and enquired after Mr. Ollivera, she was told he had gone to bed.

Now it appeared that Miss Rye sat over the sitting-room fire (a parlour behind the shop, underneath Mr. Ollivera's bed-room) for some time after the rest of the house had retired to rest. When at length she went to bed, she was unable to sleep. Towards morning she dropped into a doze, and was awakened (according to her own account) by a dream. A very vivid dream, that startled and unnerved her. She dreamt she saw Mr. Ollivera in his sitting-room—dead. And, as she seemed to look at him, a terrible amount of self-reproach, far greater than any she could ever experience in life, rushed over her mind, for not having gone in earlier to discover him. It was this feeling that awoke her: it had seemed that he cast it on her, that it came out direct to her from his dead presence, cold and lifeless though he was. So real did it all appear, that for some minutes after Miss Rye awoke, she could not believe it to be only a dream. Turning to look at her watch she saw it was half-past six, and the sun had risen. An early riser always, for she had to get her living by dress-making, Miss Rye got up and

dressed herself : but she could not throw off the impression made upon her ; and a little before seven she went down and opened the door of Mr. Ollivera's sitting-room. Not so much to see whether it might be true, or not, as to show to herself by ocular demonstration that it was not true : she might forget the impression then.

But it was true. What was Miss Rye's horror and astonishment at seeing him, Mr. Ollivera, there ! At the first moment of opening the door, she observed nothing unusual. The white blinds were down before the windows ; the tables, chairs, other furniture were as customary ; but as she stood looking in, she saw in an easy chair near the table, whose back was towards her, the head of Mr. Ollivera. With a strange bounding-on of all her pulses ; with a dread fear at her heart, that caused it to cease beating, Miss Rye went in and looked at him, and then flew out of the room, uttering startled cries.

The cries arose the house. Mrs. Jones, the young man Alfred Jones, and the servant-maid came flocking forth : the two former were nearly dressed ; the maid had been about her work down-stairs. Mr. Ollivera lay back in the easy-chair, dead and cold. The right arm hung down over the side, and imme-

diately underneath it on the carpet, looking as if it had dropped from the hand, lay the discharged pistol.

The servant and Alfred Jones ran two ways : the one for a doctor, the other to Mr. Kene the barrister, who had been intimate with Mr. Ollivera ; Mrs. Jones, a shrewd, clever woman, locking the room up exactly as it was, until they should arrive.

But now, by a singular coincidence, it happened that Mr. Butterby, abroad betimes, was the first to meet the running servant-maid, and consequently, he was first on the scene. The doctor and Mr. Kene came next, and then Bede Greatorex. Such was the story as it greeted Bede's ears.

On the table, just as both he and the servant had seen them the night before, were the neatly-stacked law papers. Also a folded legal document that had been brought from town by himself, Bede Greatorex. There were also pens, ink, and a sheet of note-paper, on which some lines were written. They were as follows :—

“ MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is of no use. Nothing more can be done. Should I never see you again, I beg you once for all to believe me when I say that I *have* made efforts,

though they have been ineffectual. And when

“The pistol is ready to my hand. Good-bye.”

The first portion of this letter, up to the point of the abrupt breaking off, was written in Mr. Ollivera’s usual steady hand. The latter portion was scrawling, trembling, and blotted; the writing bearing but a faint resemblance to the rest. Acute Mr. Butterby remarked that it was just the kind of writing an agitated man might pen, who was about to commit an evil deed. There was no clue as to whom the note had been intended for, but it appeared to point too evidently to the intention of self-destruction. Nevertheless, there was one at least who doubted.

“Is it so, think you?” asked Mr. Kene, in a low tone, as he stood by the side of Bede Greatorex, who was mechanically turning over the papers on the table one by one.

“Is it what?” asked Bede, looking up, his tone sharp with pain.

“Self-destruction. There never lived a man less likely to commit it than your cousin, John Ollivera.”

“As I should have thought,” returned Mr. Greatorex. “But if it is not that, what else can it be?”

“There is one other possible solution, at least: putting any idea of accident aside.”

The supposition of accident had not occurred to Bede Greatorex. A gleam of surprised cheerfulness crossed his face.

“Do you indeed think it could have been an accident, Kene? Then——”

“No; I think it could not have been,” interrupted the barrister. “I said, putting the idea of that aside: it is the most improbable of any. I alluded to the other alternative.”

Mr. Greatorex understood his meaning, and shrank from its unpleasantness. “Who would harm Ollivera, Kene? He had not an enemy in the world.”

“So far as we know. But I declare to you, Greatorex, I think it the more likely thing of the two.”

Bede Greatorex shook his head. The facts, so far as they were yet disclosed, seemed decisive and unmistakable.

They passed into the bed-room. It was all just as the servant had left it the past evening, ready for the occupation of Mr. Ollivera. On a small table lay his Prayer-book, and the pocket Bible he was wont to carry with him in travelling. Bede Greatorex felt a sudden faintness steal over him as he looked, and leaned for a few moments against the wall.

But he had no time for indulging grief. He went out, enquired for the telegraph office, and sent a message with the news to his father in town, softening it as well as circumstances allowed: as we all like to do at first when ill news has to be told. He simply stated that John (the familiar name Mr. Ollivera was known by at home) had died suddenly. The message brought down his brother, Frank Greatorex, some hours later.

To say that the town was thrown into a commotion almost equal to that of Mrs. Jones's house, would be superfluous. A young barrister, known to many of the inhabitants, who had come in with the judges only on Saturday; who was to have led in a cause in the Nisi Prius Court on that very morning, Tuesday, and to be junior in another cause set down for Wednesday, in which Mr. Kene, the experienced and renowned Queen's Counsel, led, had been found dead! And by such a death! It took the public by storm. Mrs. Jones's shop was besieged to an extent that she had to put up her shutters: High Street was impassable: and all those in the remotest degree connected with the deceased or with the circumstances, were followed about and stared at as though they were wild animals. Five hundred conjectures were hazarded and

spoken: five hundred tales told that had no foundation. Perhaps the better way to collect the various items of fact together for the reader, will be to transcribe some of the evidence given before the coroner. The inquest was fixed to take place on the Wednesday morning, in the club-room of an inn lying conveniently near.

CHAPTER III.

BEFORE THE CORONER.

THE coroner and jury assembled at an unusually early hour, for the convenience of Mr. Kene, who wished to be present. It had been thought that the only brother of the deceased, a clergyman, would have come down ; but he had not arrived. After viewing the body, which lay still at Mrs. Jones's, the proceedings commenced. Medical testimony was given as to the cause of death—a pistol-shot that had penetrated the heart. The surgeon, Mr. Hurst, who had been called in at the first discovery on Tuesday morning, stated that to the best of his belief, death (which must have been instantaneous) had taken place early the previous evening, he should say about seven or eight o'clock. And this view was confirmed in rather a singular manner. Upon examining the quantity of oil in the lamp, which Mrs. Jones had herself filled, it was seen that it could not have burnt very much more than an

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dence had never been tendered him before, and he eyed the witness keenly. To see her stand there in her black robes, tall, upright, of really dignified demeanour, with her fair features and good looks—but there were dark circles round her eyes to-day, and the soft colour had left her cheeks—to hear her tell of this in her sensible, calm accents, was something marvellous.

“Were you at home on the Monday night?” asked the coroner. And it may as well be remarked that some of the questions put by him during the inquest, miscellaneous queries that did not appear to be quite in order, or have much to do with the point in question, had very probably their origin in the various rumours that had reached him, and in the doubt breathed into his ears by Mr. Kene. The coroner did not in the least agree with Mr. Kene; rather pitied the barrister as a visionary, for allowing himself to glance at such a doubt; but he was fond of diving to the bottom of things. Living in the same town, knowing all the jury personally, in the habit of exchanging a word of news with Mrs. Jones whenever he met her, the coroner may have been excused if the proceedings were slightly irregular, involving some gossip as well as law.

“No,” replied the witness. “Except that I ran in for a few minutes. I had been at work that afternoon at a neighbour’s, helping her to make a gown. I went in home to get a pattern.”

“What time was that?”

“I cannot be particular as to the exact time. It must have been nearly eight.”

“Did you see the deceased then?”

“No. I did not see any one except the servant. She was standing at the open street door. When I had been up stairs to get what I wanted I went out again.”

“Did you hear any noise as you passed Mr. Ollivera’s rooms?”

“Not any. I do not know anything more of the details, sir, than I have told you.”

The next witness called was Mr. Bede Greatorex. He gave his evidence clearly, but at portions of it was evidently under the influence of some natural emotion, which he contrived to suppress. A man does not like to show such.

“My name is Bede Greatorex. I am the son of Mr. Greatorex, the well-known London solicitor, and second partner in the firm Greatorex and Greatorex. The deceased, John Ollivera, was my cousin, his father and my mother having been brother and sister. A matter

of business arose connected with a cause to be tried in the Nisi Prius Court, in which Mr. Ollivera was to be the leading counsel, and my father despatched me down on Monday to communicate with him. I arrived by the six o'clock evening train, and was with him before half-past six. We held a business conference together; I stayed about an hour with him, and then went back to my hotel. I never afterwards saw him alive."

"I must put a few questions to you with your permission, Mr. Greatorex, for the satisfaction of the jury," observed the coroner.

"Put as many as you like, sir; I will answer them to the best of my ability," was the reply.

"First of all—what was the exact hour at which you reached Mr. Ollivera's rooms?"

"I should think it must have been about twenty minutes after six. The train got in to time, six o'clock; I took a fly to the Star and Garter, and from thence walked at once to Mr. Ollivera's lodgings, the people at the hotel directing me. The whole could not have taken above twenty minutes."

"And how long did you remain with him?"

"An hour: perhaps rather more. I should think I left him about half-past seven. I was back at the hotel by a quarter to eight, having walked slowly, looking at the different

features of the streets as I passed. I had never been in the town before."

"Well, now, Mr. Greatorex, what was the manner of the deceased while you were with him? Did you perceive anything unusual?"

"Nothing at all. He was just as he always was, and very glad to see me. We"—the witness paused to swallow his emotion—"we had ever been the best of friends and companions. I thought him a little quiet, dull. As he sat, he bent his forehead on his hand and complained of headache, saying it had been close in court that day."

("True enough," murmured Mr. Kene.)

"The news you brought down to him was not bad news?" questioned the coroner.

"Quite the contrary. It was good: favourable to our cause."

"Did you see him write the note found on his table, or any portion of it?"

"When the servant showed me into the room, he appeared to be writing a note. As he sat down after shaking hands with me, he put the blotting paper over what he had written. He did not take it off again, or write at all while I remained."

"Was it the same note, think you, that was afterwards found?"

"I should think it likely. I noticed that

some few lines only were written. About"—the witness paused a moment—"about the same quantity as in the first portion of the note."

"Did he put the blotting paper over it to prevent you seeing it, do you suppose, Mr. Greatorex?"

"I do not know. I thought he was only afraid it might get blotted. The ink was wet."

"Did any one come in while you were with him?"

"No. I wished him good night, intending to see him in the morning, and was shown out by some young man."

"Do you know to whom that note was written?"

"I have not the slightest idea. Neither do I know to what it alludes."

"Then—your theory, I presume, is—that he added that blotted concluding line after your departure? In fact, just when he was on the point of committing the rash act?"

"I do not see what else can be believed. The pen lay across the words when found, as if thrown there after writing them, and appeared to have caused the blots."

"Did he say anything to you about any appointment he had kept that afternoon?"

“ Not anything.”

“ And now about the pistol, Mr. Greatorex. Did you see one on the table ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Did it not strike you as singular that it should be there ?”

“ Not at all. Mr. Ollivera never travelled anywhere without a pistol ; it was a fancy he had. Some years ago, when in a remote part of Spain, he was attacked in his chamber at night, robbed, and rather seriously hurt ; since then he has always when travelling taken a pistol with him. I asked him what brought it on the table, and he said he had been putting a drop of oil on the lock.”

“ Did you know that it was loaded ?”

“ I did not. I really did not think much about it, one way or the other. We were busy over the business on which I came down : and I knew, as I have said, that he used to carry a pistol with him in travelling.”

“ Then—in point of fact, Mr. Greatorex, you can throw no positive light on this affair for us ?”

The witness shook his head. “ I wish I could. I have told you all I know.”

“ Do you think there can be any reasonable doubt—any doubt whatever—that he committed suicide ?”

“I fear there can be none,” replied Mr. Greatorex, in a low tone, and he shivered perceptibly as he gave it. It was a crime which Bede Greatorex had always held in shrinking, pitying abhorrence.

“One question more, and then we will release you and thank you for the clear manner in which you have given your evidence,” said the coroner. “Did you see cause to suspect in that last interview that his mind was otherwise than in a sane state?”

“Oh no; certainly not.”

“It was calm and clear as usual, for all you saw?”

“Quite so.”

“Stay. There’s one other point. Was the deceased in any kind of embarrassment, so far as your cognizance goes, pecuniary, or else?”

“I feel quite sure that he was in no pecuniary embarrassment whatever,” returned the witness warmly, anxious to do justice to his cousin’s memory. “As to any other kind of embarrassment, I cannot speak. I am aware of none; and I should think he was one of the least likely men to get into any.”

That was all. Mr. Bede Greatorex bowed to the coroner and gave place to another witness. A little dark woman in black, with an

old-fashioned black chip bonnet on, and silver threads beginning to mix with her black hair; but her eyebrows were very black still. Certainly no two women could present a greater contrast in appearance than she and Miss Rye, although they were sisters.

“Your name is Julia Jones,” began the coroner’s man, who knew Mrs. Jones intimately in private life.

“Yes, it *is* Julia Jones,” emphatically replied the lady, in a tart voice, and with an accent on the “Jones,” as if the name grated on her tongue. And Mrs. Jones was sworn.

After some preliminary evidence, touching Mr. Ollivera’s previous visits to her, and the length of time he had stayed, which she entered upon of her own accord and was not checked, Mrs. Jones was asked what she knew of the calamity. How it was first brought to her knowledge.

“The first was through my sister Alletha Rye shrieking out from the first-floor landing below, a little before seven o’clock on Tuesday morning,” responded Mrs. Jones, in the same tart tone; which was, in fact, habitual to her. “I was in my bed-room, the front room on the second floor, dressed up to my petticoat, and out I flew, thinking she must be on fire. She said something about

Mr. Ollivera, and I ran down, and saw him lying dead in the chair. Jones's nephew, in his waistcoat and shirt-sleeves, and his face all in a lather, for he was shaving, got into the room when I did."

"When did you see the deceased last, Mrs. Jones?" was the next question put, after the witness had described the appearance of the room, the pistol on the carpet, the blotted note on the table, the quantity of oil in the lamp, and so forth.

"When did I see him last? why on the Monday afternoon, when he came in from court," responded Mrs. Jones. "I was crossing the hall at the foot of the stairs, between the parlour and the shop, as he came in. He looked tired, and I said so; and he answered that he had been about all day, in the court and elsewhere, and *was* tired. That's when I saw him last: never after, till I saw him in his chair, dead."

"You heard nothing of his movements on that evening?"

"I wasn't likely to hear it, seeing I went out as soon as the shop was shut. Before it, in fact, for I left Jones's nephew to put up the shutters. Old Jenkins is dying, as all the parish knows, and I went to sit with him and take him some beef-tea. Jones's nephew,

he went out too, to his debating club, as he calls it. And precious debating it must be," continued Mrs. Jones, with additional tartness, "if the debaters are all as green and soft as he ! Alletha Rye, she was at work at Mrs. Wilson's : and so, as ill-luck had it, all the house was out."

" Except your servant, Susan Marks," observed one of the jury. " She was left at home to keep house, we hear."

" And in a very pretty manner she did keep it !" retorted Mrs. Jones, as if she had taken a pint of vinegar to set her teeth on edge ; while Susan Marks, at the back, gave a kind of groan, and burst into fresh tears. " Up the street here, down the street there, over the way at the doors yonder, staring, and gossiping, and gampusing—that's how *she* kept it. And on an assize night, of all nights in the year, to be airing her cap in the street, when barristers and other loose characters are about !"

The gratuitous compliment paid to the barristers raised a laugh, in spite of the sad enquiry the court had met upon. Mrs. Jones's epithet sounded, however, worse to others than to herself.

" And she could tell me, when I got in just before eleven, that Mr. Ollivera had gone to

bed!" resumed that lady, in intense aggravation: "which, of course, I believed, and we all went up to our rooms, suspecting nothing. Let me ever catch her out at the street door again! home she'll go to Upton Snodsbury."

Groans from the back, in the vicinity of Susan Marks.

"Had you known previously, Mrs. Jones, that Mr. Ollivera was in the habit of bringing with him a loaded pistol?"

"Yes; for he told me. One day last October, when I was up dusting his drawing-room, he had got it out of the case. I said I should not like to have such a weapon near me, and he laughed at that. He used to keep it on the chest of drawers in his bed-room: that is, the case; and I suppose the thing itself was inside."

"Your husband was not at home when this unfortunate event happened, Mrs. Jones?"

"No, he was *not*," assented Mrs. Jones; and it was as if she had swallowed a whole gallon of vinegar now. "He has been off to Wales last week and this, and is as likely as not to be there next."

Another question or two, not of much import, and Mrs. Jones gave place to her husband's nephew. He was known in the town for a steady, well-conducted young man, quite

trustworthy. He had not very much to tell.

“ My name is Alfred Jones,” he said, “ and I live with my uncle, Richard Jones, as assistant in the shop——”

“ ——Which wouldn’t want any assistant at all, if Jones stayed at home and stuck to his duties,” put in Mrs. Jones’s sharp voice, from the back. Upon which she was admonished to hold her tongue: and the witness continued.

“ On Monday night, I put up the shutters at seven, as usual in the winter season; I changed my coat, washed my hands, and went to the debating club in Goose Lane. Soon after I got there I found I had forgotten a book that I ought to have taken back to the club’s library. The time for my keeping it was up, and as we are fined twopence if we keep a book over time, I went back to get it. It was then half-past seven. The street door was open, and Susan, the servant, was standing at it outside. As I ran up the stairs, the book being in my bed-room at the top of the house, I heard the drawing-room door open just after I passed it; I turned my head, and saw a gentleman come out. He——”

“ Did you know him, witness?”

“ No, sir, he was a stranger to me. I know

him now for Mr. Greatorex. He was talking to Mr. Ollivera. They were making an appointment for the next morning."

"Did you hear what was said?"

"Yes, sir. As I looked round at the gentleman he was turning his head back to the room, and said, 'Yes, you may rely upon my coming early; I'll be here before nine o'clock. Good night, John.' Those were, I think, the exact words, sir."

"Did you see Mr. Ollivera?"

"No, sir, he did not come out, and the gentleman only pushed the door back a little while he spoke. If it had been wide open I couldn't have seen in; I was too far, some two or three steps up the stairs. I turned back then to attend Mr. Greatorex to the street door. After that I ran up for my book, and left the house again. I was not two minutes in it altogether."

"Did you see Mr. Ollivera as you came down?"

"No, sir. The drawing-room door was closed, as Mr. Greatorex had left it. I never saw or heard of Mr. Ollivera again until Miss Rye's screams brought me down the next morning. That is all I know."

"At what hour did you go home on Monday evening?"

"It was close upon eleven, sir. We generally disperse at half-past ten, but we stayed late that night. Mrs. Jones and Miss Rye had not long come in, and were in the sitting-room."

The next witness called was Susan Marks. The young woman, what with her own heinous offences on the eventful night, the dreadful calamity itself, and the reproaches of her mistress, had been in a state of tears ever since, fresh bursts breaking forth at the most unseasonable times.

Susan Marks, aged nineteen, native of Upton Snodsbury, cook and servant-of-all-work to Mrs. Jones. Such was the young woman's report of herself, as well as could be heard for her sobs and tears. She was attired neatly and well ; in a print mourning gown and straw bonnet trimmed with black ; her face, that would otherwise have been fresh and clear, had small patches of red upon it, the result of the many tears and of perpetual rubbing.

"Now, young woman," said the coroner briskly, as if he thought time was being lost, "what have you to tell us of the events of Monday night?"

"Nothing, sir," replied the young woman, in a fresh burst of grief that could be called nothing less than a howl. "I never see Mr.

Ollivera at all after I showed the gentleman up to him."

" Well, let us hear about that. What time was it ?"

" It was past six, sir ; I don't know how much. I had washed up Mr. Ollivera's dinner things, and was putting the plates and dishes on the dresser shelves, when Mr. Ollivera's bell rang. It was for his lamp, which I lighted and took in : he always wanted it afore daylight was well over when he was busy. He seemed in a hurry, and drew down the window-blinds himself. I lighted the gas-burner outside the drawing-room door, and went back to the kitchen. No sooner was I there—leastways it couldn't have been five minutes —when there came a ring at the street door bell. I went to answer it, and saw a tall gentleman, who asked for Mr. Ollivera, and I showed him upstairs to the drawing-room."

" Who was that gentleman ?"

" It was Mr. Greatorex. But I didn't know him then, sir. I thought it was a barrister ; he didn't give no name."

" Did you see Mr. Ollivera when you took this gentleman up ?"

" Yes, sir. He was sitting with his back towards us, writing at the table, and I see the things on it. I hadn't noticed them much

when I took the lamp in. I see the papers put together tidy, which had been all about when he was at his dinner. I think he was very busy that evening," urged the witness, as if the fact might plead an excuse for what afterwards took place : " when I removed the dinner things he told me to put the sherry wine away on the sideboard ; sometimes, if he wanted to drink any, he'd have it left on the table."

" Did he seem glad to see Mr. Greatorex ?"

" Yes, sir, very. They shook hands, and Mr. Greatorex began telling him what he had come down about, and said his father had sent him in place of telegrumming. I asked Mr. Ollivera what time he'd like to have tea, but he said he didn't know whether he should take any, he might be going out ; if he wanted it, he'd ring. How was I to think, after that, that I ought to have went up to him, to see how he might be getting on, which missis has been a going on at me ever since for not doing ?" demanded the witness, with a stream of tears.

" Come, come ! there, wipe your face," said one of the jury, with gruff kindness. And the questions went on, and the witness's replies.

It was about an hour that Mr. Greatorex

stayed, she thought. She saw him come out at the street door, and go away. Well, yes, she *was* a yard or two off, at a neighbour's door, next house but one. After missis went out and the shop was shut, and Alfred Jones went out, and there wasn't nobody indoors to want her, she had thought it no harm to stand at the street door a bit: and if she did go a step or two away from it, she never took her eyes off the door, and no person could go in or out without her seeing them, and that she'd swear. She saw Mr. Greatorex come out and walk away up High Street; and she never heard no sound in the house whatsoever.

“Did any one go in?” the coroner asked.

“No, sir, not a soul—barring Alfred Jones and Miss Rye. Alfred Jones came back after he first went out, saying he had forgot something, and he went upstairs to fetch it. He wasn't there no time; and it was while he was up there that Mr. Greatorex came down and left. Soon after that, Miss Rye, she come in, and went up-stairs, and was there ever so long.”

“What do you call ‘ever so long?’”

“Well, sir, I'm sure she was there a quarter of an hour,” returned the witness, in a quick, positive sort of tone, as if the fact of Miss Rye's being there so long displeased her.

“ I ought to know ; and me a-standing inside the door-sill, afraid to move off it for fear she should come out.”

“ Were you alone ?”

“ Well, yes, sir, I was. Mary, the house-maid at the big linendraper’s, next door but one, can bear me out that I was, for she was there all the time, talking to me.”

Perhaps the coroner thought the answer savoured of Hibernianism, for something like a smile crossed his face.

“ And you heard no sound whatever upstairs all the evening, Susan Marks ? You saw no one, except the persons mentioned, go in or come out ; no stranger ?”

“ I never heard no sound, and never saw no stranger at all,” said the witness, earnestly. “ I never even saw Godfrey Pitman leave. But I b’lieve he was away earlier.”

The concluding assertion fell with some surprise on the room ; there ensued a pause, and the coroner lifted his head sharply. Godfrey Pitman ? Who was Godfrey Pitman ?

“ Who is Godfrey Pitman, witness ?”

“ It was the lodger at the top of the house, sir. He had the front bedroom there—and a fine dance it was to carry his meals up. Mis-sis gave him the offer of eating them in the little room off the kitchen, but I suppose he

was too proud to come down. Any way, he *didn't* come."

"Is he lodging there now?"

"Oh no, sir, he was only there a week and a day, and left on the Monday. He was a traveller in the spectacles line, he told me, passing through the town ; which he likewise wore himself sometimes. Well, sir, I never see him go at all, and he didn't give me never a shilling for having waited on him and carried his trays up all them stairs."

The girl had told apparently what she knew, and the coroner requested Mrs. Jones to come in again. He questioned her about the lodger.

"It was a person of the name of Pitman," she answered, readily. "He was only passing through the town, and occupied the room for a week."

"Who was he?" asked the coroner. "Did you know him?"

"I didn't know him from Adam," answered Mrs. Jones, tartly ; "I didn't know anything about him. I called him Alletha Rye's lodger, not mine, for it was she who picked him up. He may have told her all about himself, for aught I can say : she seemed to take a desperate fancy to him, and mended his travelling

bag. He didn't tell me. Not but what he seemed a civil, respectable man."

"When did he leave you, Mrs. Jones?"

"On Monday, about half-past four, when he took the five o'clock train for Birmingham. He came to the inner shop door as he was going out, and thanked me for my kindness, as he called it, in taking him in at a pinch; he said it was not what every one would do for a stranger. Neither is it."

"You are sure he left you at that hour?"

"Have I got the use of my eyes and senses?" demanded Mrs. Jones. "Sure! I walked to the side door after him, and saw him go up the street towards the railway with his blue bag. Of course I am sure. It was as I crossed the hall, on my way back, that Mr. Ollivera came in, and I spoke to him, as I have told you."

It was therefore placed beyond doubt that the lodger, Mr. Pitman, could have no part or act in what took place in the house later. The coroner would have dismissed the subject summarily, but that one of the jury, a man who liked to hear himself talk, expressed an opinion that it might be satisfactory if they questioned Miss Rye. With a gesture of impatience, the coroner called for her.

She came in, was asked what she knew of

Mr. Pitman, and stood before them in silence, her face a little bent, her fore-finger, encased in its well-fitting black kid glove, pressed lightly on her lip, her clear blue eye looking out straight before her. It was as if she were trying to recall something to her memory.

“I recollect now,” she said, after a minute: “I could not remember what took me up by the railway station, where I met him. It was on last Sunday week, in the afternoon. Mrs. Hillman, who lives up there, was ill, and I had been to see her. As I was leaving her house, towards dusk, a few passengers were coming down from the station. I stood on the door-step until they should have passed; and one of them, who had a blue bag in his hand, like those that lawyers’ clerks carry, stopped and asked me if I had a room in my house that I could let him occupy for a week. I supposed he took the house where I stood for mine. He went on to say he was a traveller and stranger, had never before been to the town, felt very poorly, and would very much wish to be spared the bustle of an hotel. I knew that my sister, Mrs. Jones, had a bed-room ready for letting,” continued Miss Rye, “and I thought she might not object to oblige him; he spoke quite as a gentleman, and I

felt rather sorry for him, for he looked haggard and ill. That is how it happened."

"And your sister admitted him, and he stayed the week?" cried the juror.

"Strictly speaking, I admitted him; for when we reached home I found Mrs. Jones had gone to sit with old Jenkins for the rest of the day. So I took it upon myself to do so. On Saturday last Mr. Pitman said he would, with our permission, remain a day over the week, and leave on Monday."

"And did he pay the rent, Miss Rye?" asked the juror, who perhaps had a doubt on the point.

"He paid the first week's rent as soon as he was admitted to the house, and gave a sovereign towards the purchase of his provisions," was the answer. "What remained he settled for on the Monday, previous to his departure by the five o'clock train for Birmingham."

"Who was he, witness? Where did he come from?"

"I really cannot tell much about him," was Miss Rye's reply. "I understood him to say he was a traveller; his name, as he wrote it down for us, was Godfrey Pitman. He was laid up with a bad cold and relaxed throat all

the time he stayed, and borrowed some books of me to read."

There appeared to be no further scope for the exercise of the juror's powers ; no possible loop-hole for bringing this departed Mr. Godfrey Pitman into connection with the death of Mr. Ollivera ; and Miss Rye was allowed to depart.

Little more evidence was to be gleaned. Mr. Kene, tendering evidence, spoke of his long intimacy with the deceased, and of their last interview, when he was just the same that he ever had been : calm, cheerful, earnest-purposed. He could not understand, he added, how it was possible for Mr. Ollivera to have laid violent hands on himself—unless, indeed, the headache, of which he had complained, had proceeded from some derangement of the functions of the brain, and induced temporary insanity.

But this suggested theory was wholly incompatible with the letter that had been found, and with Mr. Bede Greatorex's testimony of the sane mind of the deceased when he quitted him. The jury shook their heads : keen-eyed Mr. Butterby, looking on unobtrusively from a remote nook of the room, shook his.

The inquest drew to a close ; the one fatal

element in the evidence being the letter found on the table. The coroner and jury debated upon their verdict with closed doors, and only re-admitted the public when they had decided. It did not take them long.

“ Felo-de-se.”

In accordance with the customary usage, a mandate was issued for a night interment, without Christian rites; and the undertaker promised to be ready for that same night.

The crowd filed out of the room, talking eagerly. That it was undoubtedly a case of self-murder, and that in the most unhappy sense of the word, none doubted. No, not one: even Mr. Kene began to waver.

As they were dispersing hither and thither along the street, there came hastily up a young man in the garb of a clergyman. It was the Reverend Henry William Ollivera, brother of the deceased gentleman. He had just arrived by train. In as few words as possible, his cousin, Frank Greatorex, and Mr. Kene imparted to him some hasty particulars of the unhappy event.

“ He never did it,” said the clergyman, solemnly. “ Bede”—for at that moment Bede Greatorex joined the speakers—“ how could you suffer them to bring in a verdict so horrible ?”

But Mr. Ollivera had not heard the full details yet. By common consent, as it were, they had not at first told him of the letter. Bede would not tell it now. Let the worst come out to him by degrees, thought he.

"I am going up to town," said Bede Greatorex. "If—"

"And not stay for to-night?" interrupted one of them, in an accent that savoured of reproach.

"Nay, I must consider my father," was the grave reply of Bede. "He is in suspense all this while, waiting for news."

So they parted. Bede Greatorex hastened to catch the departing train for London. And the others remained to see the last of the illfated John Ollivera.

He was carried out of Mr. Jones's in the bright moonlight, soon after eleven o'clock had struck. Whether intentionally, as best befitting the scanty ceremony to be performed, or whether in accidental forgetfulness, the undertaker had failed to provide a covering for the coffin. And Mrs. Jones, with sundry sharp and stinging words of reprimand to the man, as it was in the nature of Mrs. Jones's tongue to give, brought down a long woollen black scarf-shawl, and helped to spread it over the coffin with her own hands.

Thus the procession started, preceded by many curious gazers, followed by more, Alletha Rye stealing on amidst the latter number ; and so went on to the place of interment.

You have seen what took place there.

CHAPTER IV.

GOING HOME WITH THE NEWS.

IN the vicinity of Bedford Square, so near to it that we may as well designate the locality by that name throughout the story, stood the large professional residence of Greatorex and Greatorex. It was large in every sense of the word ; both as to the size of the house, and to the extent of the business transacted in it. A safe, good, respectable firm was that of Greatorex and Greatorex, standing as well in the public estimation as any solicitors could stand : and deservedly so. Mr. Greatorex was a man of nice honour ; upright, just, trustworthy. He would not have soiled his hands with what is technically called dirty work : if any client wanted underhand business done, swindling work (although it might be legal) that would not bear the light of day, he need not take it to Greatorex and Greatorex.

The head of the firm, John Greatorex, was

still in what many call the prime of life. He was fifty-eight, active and energetic. Marrying when he was very young, he really did not look a great deal older than his son Bede. And Bede was not his first-born. The eldest son had entered the army ; he was in India now, Captain Greatorex. *He* also had married young, and his little daughter and only child had been sent home to her grand-parents in accordance with the prevailing custom.

The wife of Mr. Greatorex had been Miss Ollivera, sister to the father of John Ollivera the barrister, whose sad end has been lately recorded. Mrs. Greatorex had fallen into ill health for some time past now ; in fact she was slowly dying of an incurable complaint. But for not liking to leave her, Mr. Greatorex might have hastened down as soon as the sad news reached him of his nephew's premature end. I say he "might ;" but Mr. Greatorex was, himself, only recovering from an attack of illness, and was scarcely strong enough to travel. And so he waited at home with all the patience he could call up, understanding nothing but that his nephew John, who had been as dear to him as were his own children, was dead. His children had been many : eight. James (Captain Greatorex), the eldest; Bede the second, one year younger ; next

came two daughters, who were married and away ; then a son, Matthew, who was working his way to competency in Spain ; the two next had died, and Francis was the youngest. The latter, called Frank always, was in the house in Bedford Square, but not yet made a partner.

The young barrister just dead, John Ollivera, left no relations to mourn for him, except his brother Henry William, and the Greatorex family. The two brothers had had to make their own way in the world, their uncle Mr. Greatorex helping them to do it ; the elder one choosing the Bar (as you have seen) ; Henry William, the Church. John had his chambers in Lincoln's Inn, and would certainly have risen into note had he lived ; Henry William was a curate.

Three o'clock was striking in London on Wednesday afternoon, as a train slackened its speed and drew into the Paddington terminus. One of the first of its passengers to alight was Mr. Bede Greatorex. He had a small black bag in his hand, and jumped with it into a hansom cab.

“ Bedford Square !”

The cabman answered with a nod as he touched his hat. He had driven Mr. Bede Greatorex before, who was sufficiently well

known in London. Instead, however, of being permitted to dash up to the well-known door, the man found himself stopped a few yards short of it.

“I’ll get out here,” said Bede Greatorex.

Paying the fare, he went on with his bag, and glanced up at the windows as he crossed to the house. All the blinds were down. It was a very large house: it had been two originally. In the old, old days, some thirty or more years ago, Mr. Greatorex had rented only one of the houses. As his family and business increased, he bought the one he occupied and the next adjoining, and made them into one. There were two entrances still; the one pertained to the house and Mrs. Greatorex; the other was the professional entrance. The rooms on the ground floor—and there were several—were taken up by the business; one of them, looking to the garden, was the sitting-room of Mr. Greatorex.

Bede went to the private entrance, and let himself in with his latch-key. Lodging his small bag at the foot of the handsome staircase, he walked through some passages to his father’s sitting-room; which was empty. Retracing his steps he went upstairs; a maid-servant happened to meet him on the first landing; he handed her the bag and opened

the door of the dining-room. A spacious, well-fitted up apartment, its paper white and gold, with streaks of crimson slightly intermingled to give it colour.

Mr. Greatorex was there. He sat over the fire and had fallen asleep. It surprised Bede: for Mr. Greatorex was a man not given to idleness or indulgence of any kind. Indeed, to see him sitting upstairs in the day time was an event almost unknown. Bede closed the door again softly. There was a haggard look in the elder man's face, partly the effect of his recent illness; and Bede would not disturb him.

Outside the door, he stood a moment in hesitation. It was a spacious landing-place, something like an upper hall. The floor was carpeted with dark green; painted windows—yellow, blue, crimson—threw down a bright light of colour; there was a small conservatory at one end, containing odoriferous plants on which the sun was shining; and a chaste statue or two imparted still life to the whole.

Bede hesitated. None but himself knew how horribly he hated and dreaded the tale he had to tell about poor John Ollivera. All the way up he had been rehearsing to himself the manner in which he should break it for the best, but the plan had gone clean out of his head now.

"I'll go up and wash my hands first, at any rate," decided Bede. "The dust was worse than we had it on Monday."

Ascending to the second landing, he was quietly crossing it to his own room, when a door was flung open, and a pretty little girl in blue, her curling hair bound back with ribbons, came flying out. It was the daughter of Captain Greatorex. The young lady had naturally a will of her own; and since her arrival from India, the indulgence lavished on her had not tended to lessen it. But she was a charming child, and wonderfully keen.

"Oh, Bede, have you come back! Grandmamma has been asking for you all the day."

"Hush, Jane! I'll go in to grandmamma presently."

Miss Jane did not choose to "hush." She evaded Bede's hand, flew across the soft carpet of the landing, and threw open a bed-room door, calling out that Bede had come. As to styling him Uncle Bede, she had never done anything of the kind.

He heard his mother's voice, and could almost have boxed the child's ears. Back she came again, laying hold of him this time, her saucy dark brown eyes, grave now, lifted to his face.

"Bede, how came John Ollivera to die?"

“Hush, Jane,” he said again. This was precisely the point on which he did not care to hold present communication with his mother. He wished, if possible, to spare her; but the little girl was persistent.

“*Is he dead, Bede?*”

“Yes, child, he is dead.”

“Oh, dear! And he can never kiss me again, or bring me new dolls! I broke the last one in two, and threw it at him.”

Her eyes filled with tears. Bede, deep in thought, put away the little hands that had fastened on his arms.

“I liked him better than you, Bede. What made him die?”

“Bede! Bede! is that you?” called out his mother.

Bede had to go in. Mrs. Greatorex was on the sofa, dressed, her back supported by pillows. Her complexion was of dark olive, showing her Spanish extraction; a capable, kindly woman she had ever been in life; and was endeavouring now to meet the death that she knew could not be far off, as a Christian should. He stooped and kissed her. In features he resembled her more than any of her children.

“Do you feel better, mother?”

“My dear, you know that there can be no

‘better’ for me here. The pain is not heavy to-day. Have you just come up to town?”

“Just got in now.”

“And what have you to tell me? I cannot believe that John is dead. When the telegram came yesterday morning, your father happened to be with me, and they brought it up. But for that, I dare say he would not have told me yet. He spares me all the trouble that he can, you know, dear. I fainted, Bede; I did indeed. The death must have been very sudden.”

“Yes,” replied Bede.

“Was it a fit? Jane, run to the school-room. Your governess will be angry at your staying away so long.”

Jane’s answer to this mandate was to perch herself on the arm of the sofa, side by side with the speaker, and to fix her eyes and her attention on the face of Bede.

“None of the Olliveras have been subject to fits; remember that, Bede,” continued Mrs. Greatorex. “Neither did John himself look at all likely for one. To think that he should go before me! Jane, my little dear one, you must indeed go to Miss Ford.”

“I am going to stay here, grand’ma, and to hear about John.”

“There’s nothing much to hear, or to tell,”

spoke Bede, as much perhaps for his mother's ear as for the child's. "If you do not obey your grandmamma, Jane, I shall take you myself to the schoolroom."

"No you won't, Bede. Why don't you answer grand'ma about John?"

Mrs. Greatorex had nearly left off contending with Miss Jane; weary, sick, in pain, it was too much effort, and she generally yielded to the dominant little will. As she appeared to do now, for it was to Bede she spoke.

"Bede, dear, you are keeping me in suspense. Was it a fit?"

"No; it could not be called a fit."

"The heart, perhaps?"

"His death must have been quite sudden," said Bede, with pardonable evasion. "Instantaneous, the doctors thought: and therefore without pain."

"Poor John! poor John! The veil is lifted for him. Bede!"

Bede had begun to turn his attention to the young lady, and was putting her down from the sofa. He wheeled round at the word, and Miss Jane mounted again.

"What, mother?"

Mrs. Greatorex dropped her voice reverently; and her dark eyes, looking large from

illness, had a bright, hopeful, yearning light in them as she spoke.

“I think he was fit to go.”

“Yes,” answered Bede, swallowing a lump of emotion. “It is the one drop of comfort amidst much darkness. At least——. But I must keep my word,” he added, breaking suddenly off, and seizing the child again, as if glad of an excuse to cease; “you go now to Miss Ford, young lady.”

She set up a succession of cries. Bede only carried her away the faster.

“You’ll come back and tell me more, Bede,” said Mrs. Greatorex.

“I will come by-and-by,” he turned to say. “I have pressing things to do; and I have not yet spoken with my father. Try and get your afternoon’s sleep, mother dear.”

Miss Ford, a nursery governess, stood at the school-room door, and began to scold her pupil as she received her from the hands of Mr. Bede Greatorex. He shut himself into his room for a few minutes, and then descended the stairs in deep thought. He had begun to ask himself whether the worst could not be kept from his mother; not for very long could she be spared to them now.

Mr. Greatorex was then coming out of the dining-room. He shook hands with his son,

and they went back and sat down together. Bede grew quite agitated at the task before him. He hated to inflict pain ; he knew that John Ollivera had been dear to his father, and that the blow would be keenly felt. All the news as yet sent up by him to Bedford Square was, that John was dead.

Whence, then, that grey look on his father's face ? — the haggard mouth, the troubled, shrinking eyes, going searchingly out to Bede's ? Mr. Greatorex was a fresh-looking man in general, with a healthy colour and smooth brown hair, tall and upright as his son. He looked short and shrinking and pale now.

“ Bede, how came he to do it ? ”

Something like a relief came into Bede's heart as he heard the words. It was so much better for the way to have been paved for him ! — the shock would not be so great.

“ Then you know the particulars, sir.”

“ I fear I know the truth, Bede ; not the particulars. *The Times* had a short paragraph this morning, saying that John Ollivera had died by his own hand. Was it so ? ”

Bede gravely nodded. His breath was coming and going faster than is consistent with inward calmness.

“ My God ! ” cried Mr. Greatorex, from be-

tween his quivering lips, as he sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. But the sacred word was not spoken in irreverence ; no, nor in surprise ; rather, as it seemed, in the light of an appealing prayer.

“And what could have induced it ?” came the question presently, as he let his hands fall.

“I had better tell you the whole from the beginning,” said Bede, “you will then——”

“Tell it, of course,” interrupted Mr. Greatorex. “Begin at the beginning.”

Bede stood up, facing the fire ; his elbow on the mantel-piece, his back partially turned to his father, while he told it : he did not care to watch the anguish and horror of the usually placid face. He concealed nothing : relating how he had reached the City and held an interview with his cousin ; how he had left him after the lapse of an hour, promising to be with him in the morning before starting for town ; and how he had been aroused from his bed by the tidings that John was dead. He described the state of the room when found ; the pistol lying underneath the hand ; the note on the table. As well as Bede Greatorex could repeat the details, as testified to before the coroner—and we may be very sure they

were implanted with painful exactitude on his memory—he gave them all faithfully.

“It might have been an accident,” urged Mr. Greatorex, in an imploring kind of tone, as if he wanted to be assured that it was.

Bede did not answer.

“I forgot the writing, Bede; I forgot the writing,” said Mr. Greatorex, with a groan.

“Whatever it might be, whether accident or self-intended, it is an awful shame to bury him as they are going to do,” burst forth Bede, in a sudden access of anger.

And the words served to tell Mr. Greatorex what the verdict had been.

“It is a sin, sir; yes, it is. I could not stay to see it.”

“So it may be, Bede; but that’s the least of it,—that’s the least of it. I’d as soon have believed myself capable of such a thing as that John Ollivera was. Oh, John! John!”

A painful silence. Bede felt glad that his task was so far over.

“His motive, Bede? What could have been his motive?”

“There was no motive, father; as far as I can see.”

“You were young men together, Bede; of the same pursuits—frequent companions; did

you ever suspect he had any care, or embarrassment, or trouble?"

"No. He had none, I feel sure."

"Those first words of the note, as you have related them, sound curious," resumed Mr. Greatorex. "What was it that he was trying to accomplish?"

"We cannot discover; no clue whatever has come to light. It would almost seem as though he had written them to the air, without foundation."

"That would be to say his senses had deserted him."

"Kene thinks that the head-ache of which he had complained may have proceeded from some disordered function of the brain, and induced insanity."

"Do you think it?" asked Mr. Greatorex, looking at his son. "You were the last person who saw him alive."

"I should be glad to think it if I could. He was quite calm and collected when I was with him; just as usual."

"The extraordinary thing to me is, that nobody should have heard the discharge of the pistol."

"The people of the house were all out. Even the servant-girl had gone about the neighbourhood gossiping."

“ It might have been heard in the street.”

“ If the street were quiet, perhaps yes. But on assize nights, they tell me, there is an unusual deal of out-door bustle.”

Mr. Greatorex sat looking at the fire, and revolving the different points of the dreadful history. Bede resumed.

“ I was wondering whether the worst of the details could be kept from my mother. They would try her terribly. She only thinks as yet, I find, that he died suddenly.”

“ Because she only knows as much as your telegram said. It will be impossible to keep it from her ; the newspapers will be full of it. Three times to-day has your mother sent down for *The Times*, and I have returned an excuse. There’s no help for it, Bede.”

“ Then you shall tell her, sir. I can’t. It must be broken to her by degrees. How was it William Ollivera was so late in coming down ?” he suddenly resumed. “ He only arrived to-day as I was departing.”

“ William Ollivera was out of town, and did not return until last night. You have said nothing about our cause, Bede.”

“ That’s all right. It was taken yesterday afternoon. Kene led in the place of John, and we got the verdict.”

“ Where are John’s papers and things ??”

“ His brother and Frank will take charge of them. I have his private letters. I thought it best to come up to you at once, knowing you were in suspense.”

“ A suspense that has been grievous since I read that paragraph this morning, Bede. I have been fit for nothing.”

Neither was Bede that day. Mr. Greatorex rose to go to his wife’s room, there to enter upon his task,—just as his son had been entering upon it with him. Bede paced the carpet for a few minutes alone. It was a long room ; the furniture not dark and heavy, but light-looking and pleasant to the eye, though comprising all the requisites for a well-appointed dining-room. Bede took a look at himself in the pier-glass, and pushed his hair off his forehead—his sisters used to accuse him of inordinate vanity. And then quitted the room and the house.

He was bending his steps to Lincoln’s Inn, to the chambers occupied by his cousin. Not many yards had he gone, before some one darted across the street and pounced upon him.

“ Halloa, Greatorex ! What’s this, that’s up about Ollivera ?”

It was a Chancery barrister, who had known

John Ollivera well. Bede Greatorex explained in a few short words, and hurried off.

"I can't stay to tell you more now," he said in apology. "There's a great deal to do and to be thought of, and I hardly know whether our heads are on our shoulders or off. I'm on my way to his chambers to search if there may be any paper, or aught else, that can throw light on it."

A hansom passed at the moment, and Bede jumped into it. He might have met fifty questioners, else, and reached his destination after dark. The chambers were on the third floor, and he went up to them. Mr. Ollivera's clerk, a small youth of nineteen, was at his post; and the laundress, who waited on Mr. Ollivera, was there also. The news had brought her up in tears.

Perhaps it was excusable that they should both begin upon Mr. Bede Greatorex in their thirst for information. Respectfully, of course, but eagerly. He responded in a few quiet words, and passed into the rooms, the woman's sobs following him.

Here was the sitting-room where John saw people; next to it his bed-room; all in neat order. Near the bed was a small mahogany stand, and a cushioned chair. On the stand lay his Bible—just as the other one was seen

but yesterday resting on its stand elsewhere. Bede knew that his cousin never failed to read that Bible, and to fall on his knees before the chair, morning and evening. He turned away with a groan, and proceeded to his work of search.

Only a casual search to-day ; there was no time for minute examination. Just a look here and there, lest haply he might come upon some paper or letter of elucidation. But he could not find any.

“ I am going to lock the rooms up, Jenner,” he said to the clerk. “ Things must be left as they are until the Reverend Mr. Ollivera comes to town. He will have the arrangement of matters. I don’t suppose there’s any will.”

“ Am I to leave the service at once, sir ?—now ?” asked Mr. Jenner, in excessive surprise.

“ You must leave the rooms now—unless you would like to be locked up in them,” returned Bede Greatorex. “ Call in Bedford Square to-morrow morning ; we may be able to recommend you to something : and perhaps you will be wanted here again for a few days.”

They quitted the chambers together ; and Mr. Bede Greatorex took possession of the

key. "I suppose," he said to the clerk, as they went down, "that you never observed any peculiarity of manner in Mr. Ollivera that might tend to induce suspicion of aberration of mind?"

The young man turned round and stared, scarcely taking in the sense of the question. Certainly there had not been anything of the kind observable in Mr. Ollivera.

"He was cheerful and sensible always, sir : he didn't seem to have a care."

Bede sighed, and proceeded homeward. A recollection came over him, as he went along in the dusk, of the last evening he had walked home from his cousin's chambers ; it was only the night before John had gone on circuit. Oh, the contrast between that time and this ! And Bede thought, in the bitter grief and sorrow of the moment, that he would willingly forfeit his own life could he recall that of John Ollivera.

CHAPTER V.

MR. BUTTERBY IN PRIVATE LIFE.

THE bustle of the assizes was over ; the tramp and tread and hum had gone out of the streets ; the judges, the barristers, and the rest of the transitory visitors had departed, to hold their assize at the next county town.

A great deal of the bustle and the hum of another event had also subsided. It does not linger very long when outward proceedings are over, and sensational adjuncts have ceased ; and Mr. Ollivera, at the best, had been but a stranger. The grave where he lay had its visitors still ; but his brother and other friends had left for London, carrying his few effects with them. Nothing remained to tell of the fatal act of the past Monday evening ; but for that grave, it might have seemed never to have had place in reality.

The Reverend Mr. Ollivera had been firm in refusing to admit belief in his brother's guilt. He did not pretend to judge how it

might have happened, whether by accident or by some enemy's hand ; but he felt convinced the death could not have been deliberately self-inflicted. It was an impossibility, he avowed to Mr. Butterby—and he was looked upon, by that renowned officer, as next door to a lunatic for his pains. There was no more shadow of a doubt on Mr. Butterby's mind that the verdict had been in accordance with the facts, than there was on other people's.

Always excepting Alletha Rye's. She had been silent to the public since the avowal at the grave ; but, in a dispute with Mrs. Jones, had repeated her assertion and belief. Upon a report of the display coming to Mrs. Jones's ears, that discreet matron — who certainly erred on the side of hard, correct, matter-of-fact propriety, if on any—attacked her sister in no measured terms. There were several years between them, and Mrs. Jones considered she had a right to do it. Much as Mrs. Jones had respected Mr. Ollivera in life, she entertained no doubt whatever on the subject of his death.

“ My opinion is, you must have been crazy,” came the sharp reprimand. “ Go off after that tramping tail to the grave ! I wish I'd seen you start. A good name's easier lost than regained, Alletha Rye.”

“ I am not afraid of losing mine,” was the calm rejoinder.

“ Folks seldom are till they find it gone,” said Mrs. Jones, tartly. “ My goodness ! not content with trapesing off there in the middle of the night, you must go and make an exhibition of yourself besides !—kneeling down on the damp earth to pray, in the face and eyes of all the people ; and then rising to make a proclamation, just as if you had been the town bellman ! Jones says it struck him dumb.”

Alletha Rye was silent. Perhaps she had felt vexed since, that the moment’s excitement had led her to the act.

“ Who are *you*, that you should put yourself up against the verdict ?” resumed Mrs. Jones. “ Are you cleverer and sharper than the jury, and the coroner, and me, and Mr. Ollivera’s friends, and the rest of the world, all of us put together ? There can’t be a *doubt* upon the point, girl.”

“ Let it drop,” said Alletha, with a shiver.

“ Drop ! I’d like to see it drop. I’d like the remembrance of it to drop out of men’s minds, but you’ve took care that shan’t be. What on earth induced you to go and do it ?”

“ It was a dreadful thing that Mr. Ollivera should lie under the imputation of having killed himself,” came the answer, after a pause.

"Now, you just explain yourself, Alletha Rye. You keep harping on that same string, about Mr. Ollivera ; what grounds have you for it ?"

The girl's pale face flushed all over. "None," she presently answered. "I've never said I had grounds. But there's that vivid dream upon me always. He seemed to reproach me for not having sooner gone into the room to find him ; and I'm sure no self-murderer would do that. They'd rather lie undiscovered for ever. Had I kept silence," she passionately added, "I might have become haunted."

Mrs. Jones stared at the speaker with all the fiery fervour of her dark, dark eyes.

"Haunted ! Haunted by what ?"

"By Mr. Ollivera's spirit ; by remorse. Remorse for not doing as I am sure he is wishing me to do—clear his memory."

Mrs. Jones lifted her hands in wonder, and for once made no retort. She began to question in real earnest whether the past matters had not turned her sister's brain.

Dicky Jones was present during this passage-at-arms, which took place on the Thursday, after breakfast. He had just been enduring a battery of tongue on his own score ; various sins, great and small, being placed before him

in glaring colours by his wife, not the least heinous of which was the having arrived home from his pleasure trip at the unseasonable hour of half after one o'clock in the morning. In recrimination he had intimated that others of the family could come in at that hour as well as himself ; not to do Alletha Rye harm, for he was a good-natured man, as people given to plenty of peccadilloes are apt to be ; but to make his own crime appear the less. And then it all came out ; and Mrs. Jones's ears were regaled with Alletha Rye's share in the doings at the interment.

On this same Thursday, but very much later in the day, Frank Greatorex and the Reverend Mr. Ollivera departed from the city, having stayed to collect together the papers and other effects of the deceased gentleman. Which brings us (the night having passed, and a great portion of the ensuing day) to the opening of the chapter.

Mr. Butterby sat in his parlour : one of two rooms he occupied on the ground floor of a private house very near a populous part of the city. He was not a police-sergeant ; he was not an inspector ; people did not know what he was. That he held sway at the police-station, and was a very frequent visitor to it, everybody saw. But Mr. Butterby had been

so long in the town that speculation, though ripe enough at first upon the point, had ceased as to what special relations he might hold with the law. When any one wanted important assistance, he could, if he chose, apply to Mr. Butterby, instead of to the regular police inspector ; and, to the mind of the sanguine inquirer, that application appeared to constitute a promise of success.

Mr. Butterby's parlour faced the street. Its one sash window, protected outside by shutters thrown back in the day, and by green dwarf venetian blinds and a white roller-blind inside, was not a very large one. Nevertheless Mr. Butterby contrived to keep a tolerable look-out from it on those of his fellow citizens who might chance to pass. He generally had the white blinds drawn down to meet, within an inch, the mahogany top of the venetian ones ; and from that inch of outlet, Mr. Butterby, standing up before the window, was fond of taking observations. It was an unpretending room, with a faded carpet and rug on the floor ; a square table in the middle, a large bureau filled with papers in a corner ; some books in a case opposite, and a stock of newspapers on the top of that ; and a picture over the mantel-piece representing Eve offering the apple to Adam.

Mr. Butterby sat by the fire at his tea, taking it thoughtfully. He wore an old green coat with short tails sprouting out from the waist, not being addicted to fashion in private life, and a red-and-black check waistcoat. It was Friday evening and nearly dusk. He had been out on some business all the afternoon ; but his thoughts were not fixed on that, though it was of sufficient importance ; they rested on the circumstances attending the death of Mr. Ollivera.

Before the brother of the deceased quitted the town, he had made an appointment with Mr. Butterby, and came to it accompanied by Frank Greatorex ; the fly, conveying them to the station, waiting at the door. The purport of his visit was to impress upon that officer his full conviction that the death was not a suicide, and to request that, if anything should arise to confirm his opinion, it might be followed up.

“ He was a good, pure-minded man ; he was of calm, clear, practical mind, of sound good sense ; he was fond of his profession, anxious to excel in it ; hopeful, earnest, and without a care in the world,” urged the Reverend Mr. Ollivera, with emotion. “ How, sir, I ask you, could such a man take away his own life ?”

Mr. Butterby shook his head. It might be unlikely, he acknowledged ; but it was not impossible.

“ I tell you it is impossible,” said Mr. Olivera. “ I hold a full, firm, positive conviction that my brother never died, or could have died, by his own wilful hands : the certainty of it in my mind is so clear as to be like a revelation from heaven. Do you know what I did, sir ? I went to the grave at night after he was put into it, and read the burial service over him.”

“ I see you doing it,” came the unexpected answer of Mr. Butterby. “ The surplice you wore was too long for you and covered your boots.”

“ It belonged to a taller man than I am—the Reverend Mr. Yorke,” the clergyman explained. “ But now, sir, do you suppose I should have dared to hold that sacred service over a man who had wilfully destroyed himself ?”

“ But instead of there being proof that he did not wilfully destroy himself, there’s every proof that he did,” argued Mr. Butterby.

“ Every apparent proof ; I admit that ; but I know—I know that the proofs are in some strange way false ; not real.”

“ The death was real ; the pistol was real ; the writing on the note-paper was real.”

"I know. I cannot pretend to explain where the explanation may be hidden ; I cannot see how or whence elucidation shall come. One suggestion I will make to you, Mr. Butterby : it is not clear that no person got access to the drawing-room after the departure from it of Mr. Bede Greatorex. At least, to my mind. I only mention this thought," concluded Mr. Ollivera, rising to close the interview ; for he had no time to prolong it. "Should you succeed in gleaning anything, address a communication to me, to the care of Greatorex and Greatorex."

"Stop a moment," cried Mr. Butterby, as they were going out. "Who holds the paper that was found on the table ?"

"I do," said Frank Greatorex. "Some of them would have had it destroyed ; Kene and my brother amidst them ; they could not bear to look at it. But I thought my father might like to see it first, and took it into my own possession."

A smile crossed the lip of the police agent. "Considering the two gentlemen you mention are in the law, it doesn't say much for their forethought, to rush at destroying the only proof there may remain to us of anybody else's being guilty."

"But then, you know, they do not admit

that any one else could have been guilty," replied Frank Greatorex. "At least, my brother does not; and Kene only looks upon it as a possible case of insanity. Do you want to see the paper? I have it in my pocket."

"Perhaps you'd not mind leaving it with me for a day or two," said Mr. Butterby. "I'll forward it up safe to you when I've done with it."

Frank Greatorex took the paper from his pocket-book and handed it to the speaker. It was folded inside an envelope now. Mr. Butterby received possession of it and attended his guests to the door, where the fly was waiting.

"You'll have to drive fast, Thompson," he said to the man. And Thompson, touching his hat to the officer, who was held in some awe by the city natives, whipped his horse into a canter.

It was upon this interview that Mr. Butterby ruminated as he took his tea on the Friday evening. In his own opinion it was the most unreasonable thing in the world, that anybody should throw doubt upon the verdict. Nothing but perversity. He judged it—and he was a keen-sighted man—to be fully in accordance with the facts, as given

in evidence. Excepting perhaps in one particular. Had he been on the jury he should have held out for a verdict of insanity.

“They are but a set of bumble-heads at the best,” soliloquised Mr. Butterby, respectfully alluding to the twelve men who had returned the verdict, as he took a large bite out of his last piece of well-buttered pikelet.

“Juries for the most part always are: if they have got any brains they send them a wool-gathering then. Hemming, the butter-and-cheese man, told me he did say something about insanity; and he was foreman, too; but the rest of ‘em and the coroner wouldn’t listen to it. It don’t much matter, for he got the burial rites after all, poor fellow: but if I’d been them, I should have gave him the benefit of the doubt.”

Stopping in his observations to put the rest of the pikelet in his mouth, Mr. Butterby went on again as he ate it.

“It might have been that, insanity; but as to the other suspicion, there’s no grounds whatever for it on the face of things at present. If such is to be raised I shall have to set to work and hunt ‘em up. Create ‘em as it were. ‘Don’t spare money,’ says that young clergyman last night when he sat here; ‘your expenses shall be reimbursed to you

with interest.' As if I could make a case out of nothing ! I'm not a French Procureur-Imperial."

Drinking down his tea at a draught, Mr. Butterby tried the tea-pot, lest a drop might be left in it still, turning it nearly upside down in the process. The result was, that the lid came open and a shower of tea-leaves descended on the tray.

"Bother !" said Mr. Butterby, as he hastily set the tea-pot in its place, and went on with his arguments.

"There's something odd about the case, though, straightforward as it seems ; and I've thought so from the first. That girl's dream, for example, which *she* says she had ; and her conduct at the grave. It was curious that Dicky Jones should just be looking on at her," added Mr. Butterby, slightly diverging from the direct line of consecutive thought : "curious that Dicky should have come up then at all. First, Alletha Rye vows he didn't do it ; and, next, the parson vows it, Reverend Ollivera. Kene, too—but he points to insanity ; and now the young fellow, Francis Greatorex. Suppose I go over the case again ?"

Stretching out his hand, Mr. Butterby pulled the bell-rope—an old-fashioned twisted

blue cord with a handle at the end ; and a young servant came in.

“ Shut the shutters,” said he.

While this was in process, he took two candles from the mantel-piece, and lighted them. The girl went away with the tea-tray. He then unlocked his bureau, and from one of its pigeon-holes brought forth a few papers, memoranda, and the like, which he studied in silence, one after the other.

“ The parson’s right,” he began presently ; “ if there is a loophole it’s where he said—that somebody got into the room after the departure of Mr. Greatorex. Let’s sum the points up.”

Drawing his chair close to the table on which the papers lay, Mr. Butterby began to tell the case through, striking his two fore-fingers alternatively on the table’s edge as each point came flowing from his tongue. Not that “ flowing ” is precisely the best word to apply, for his speech was thoughtfully slow, and the words dropped with hesitation.

“ John Ollivera, counsel-at-law. He comes in on the Saturday with the other barristers, ready for the ’sizes. Has a cause or two coming on at ’em, in which he expects to shine. Goes to former lodgings at Jones’s, and shows himself as full of sense and sanity

as usual ; and he'd got his share of both. Spends Saturday evening at his friend's, Mrs. Joliffe's, the colonel's widow ; is sweet, Mrs. Jones thinks, on one of the young ladies ; thought so when he was down last October. Gets home at ten like a decent man, works at his papers till twelve, and goes to bed."

Mr. Butterby made a pause here, both his fingers resting on the table. Giving a nod, as if his reflections were satisfactory, he lifted his hands and began again.

" Sunday. Attends public worship and takes the sacrament. *That's* not like the act of one who knows he is on the eve of a bad deed. Attends again after breakfast, with the judges, and hears the sheriff's chaplain preach. (And it was not a bad sermon, as sermons go," critically pronounced Mr. Butterby in a parenthesis). " Attends again in the afternoon to hear the anthem, the Miss Joliffes with him. Dines at Jones's at five, spends evening at Joliffes'. Home early, and to bed."

Once more the hands were lifted. Once more their owner paused in thought. He gave two nods this time, and resumed.

" Monday. Up before eight. Has his breakfast (bacon and eggs), and goes to the Nisi Prius Court. Stays there till past three

in the afternoon, tells Kene he must go out of court to keep an appointment that wasn't a particularly pleasant one, and *goes* out. Arrives at Jones's at half-past four ; passes Mrs. Jones in that there small back hall of theirs ; she tells him he looks tired ; answers that he *is* tired and has got a headache ; court was close. Goes up to his sitting-room and gets his papers about ; (papers found afterwards, on examination, to relate to the cause coming on on Tuesday morning). Girl takes up his dinner ; he eats it, gets to his papers again, and she fetches things away. Rings for his lamp early, quarter-past six may be, nearly daylight still ; while girl puts it on table, draws down blinds himself as if in a hurry to be at work again. Close upon this Mr. Bede Greatorex calls, (good firm that, Greatorex and Greatorex," interspersed Mr. Butterby, with professional candour). "Bede Greatorex has come down direct from London (sent by old Greatorex) to confer with Ollivera on the Tuesday's cause. Stays with him more than an hour. Makes an appointment with him for Tuesday morning. Jones's nephew, going up stairs at the time, hears them making it, and shows Mr. Bede Greatorex out. Might be half-past seven then, or two or three minutes over it ; call it half-past.

Ollivera never seen again alive. Found dead next morning in arm-chair ; pistol fallen from right hand, shot penetrated heart. Same chair he had been sitting in when at his papers, but drawn aside now at corner of table. Alletha Rye finds him. Tells a cock-and-bull tale of having been frightened by a dream. Dreamt he was in the sitting-room dead, and goes to see (*she* says) that he was *not* there, dead. Finds him there dead, however, just as (*she* says) she saw him in her dream. Servant rushes out for doctor, meets me, and I am the first in the room. Doctor comes, Hurst ; Kene comes, Jones's nephew fetching him ; then Kene fetches Bede Greatorex. Doctor says death must have took place previous evening not later than eight o'clock. Mrs. Jones says lamp couldn't have burnt much more than an hour : is positive it didn't exceed an hour and a half ; but she's one of the positive ones at all times, and women's judgment is fallible. Now then, let's stop."

Mr. Butterby put his hands one over the other, and looked down upon them, pausing before he spoke again.

" It draws the space into an uncommon narrow nutshell. When Bede Greatorex leaves at half-past seven, Ollivera is alive and

well—as he and Jones's nephew both testify to—and, according to the evidence of the surgeon, and the negative testimony of the oil in the lamp, he is dead by eight. If he did not draw the pistol on himself, somebody came in and shot him.

“Did he draw it on himself? I say Yes. Coroner and jury say Yes. The public say Yes. Alletha Rye and the Reverend Ollivera say No. If we are all wrong—and I don't say but that there's just a loophole of possibility of it—and them two are right, why then it was murder. And done with uncommon craftiness. Let's look at the writing.

“Those high-class lawyers are not good for much in criminal cases, can't see an inch beyond their noses; they don't practise at the Old Bailey, they don't,” remarked Mr. Butterby, as he took from the papers before him the unfinished note found on Mr. Ollivera's table, the loan of which he had begged from Frank Greatorex. “The idea of their proposing to destroy this, because ‘they couldn't bear to look at it!’ Kene, too; and Bede Greatorex! *they* might have known better. *I'll* take care of it now.”

Holding it close to one of the candles, the detective scanned it long and intently, comparing the concluding words, uneven, blotted,

as if written with an agitated hand, with the plain collected characters of the lines that were undoubtedly Mr. Ollivera's. When he did arrive at a conclusion it was a summary one, and he put down the paper with an emphatic thump.

“May I be shot myself if I believe the two writings *is* by the same hand !”

Mr. Butterby's surprise may plead excuse for his grammar. He had never, until this moment, doubted that the writing was all done by one person.

“I'll show this to an expert. People don't write the same at all times ; they'll make their capitals quite different in the same day, as anybody with any experience knows. But they don't often make their small letters different—neither do men study to alter their usual formation of letters when about to shoot themselves ; the pen does its work then, spontaneous ; naturally. These small letters are different, several of them, the *r*, the *p*, the *e*, the *o*, the *d* ; all them are as opposite as light and dark, and I *don't* think the last was written by Mr. Ollivera.”

It was a grave conclusion to come to ; partially startling even him, who was too much at home with crime and criminals to be startled easily.

“ Let’s assume that it is so for a bit, and see how it works that way,” resumed the officer. “ We’ve all been mistaken, let’s say ; Ollivera did not shoot himself, some one goes in and shoots him. Was it man or woman ; was it an inmate of the house, or not an inmate ? How came it to be done ? what was the leading cause ? Was the pistol (lying convenient on the table) took up incidental in the course of talking and fired by misadventure ?—Or did they get to quarrelling and the other shot him of malice ?—Or was it a planned, deliberate murder, one stealing in to do it in cold blood ? Halt a bit here, Jonas Butterby. The first—done in misadventure ? No : if any honest man had so shot another, he’d be the first to run out and get a doctor to him. No. Disposed of. The second—done in malice during a quarrel ? Yes ; might have been. The third—done in planned deliberation ? That would be the most likely of all, but for the fact (very curious fact in the supposition) of the pistol’s having been Mr. Ollivera’s, and put (so to say) ready there to hand. Looking at it in either of these two views, there’s mystery. The last in regard to the point now mentioned ; the other in regard to the secrecy with which the intruder must have got in. If that dratted girl had been

at her post indoors, as she ought to have been, with the chain of the door up, it might never have happened," concluded Mr. Butterby, with acrimony.

" Between half-past seven and eight ? Needn't look much before or much beyond that hour. Girl says nobody went into the house at all, except Jones's nephew, and Jones's sister-in-law. Jones's nephew did not stay ; he got his book and went off again at half-past seven, close on the heels of Bede Greatorex, Mr. Ollivera being then alive. Presently, nearer eight, Alletha Rye goes in, for a pattern, she says, and she stays upstairs, according to the girl's statement, a quarter of an hour."

Mr. Butterby came to a sudden pause. He faced the fire now, and sat staring into it as if he were searching for what he could not see.

" It does not take a quarter of an hour to get a pattern. *I* should say not. And there was her queer dream, too. Leastways, the queer assertion that she had a dream. Dreams, indeed !—moonshine. Did she invent that dream as an excuse for having gone into the room to find him ? And then look at her persistence from the first that it was not a suicide ! And her queer state of mind and manners since ! Dicky Jones told me last night

when I met him by the hop-market, that she says she's haunted by Mr. Ollivera's spirit. Why should she be, I wonder ? I mean, why should she fancy it ? It's odd ; very odd. The young woman, up to now, has always shown out sensible, in the short while this city has known her.

"That Godfrey Pitman," resumed the speaker. "The way that man's name got brought up by the servant-girl was sudden. I should like to know who he is, and what his business might have been. He was in hiding ; that's what he was. Stopping in-doors for a cold and a relaxed throat ! No doubt ! But it does not follow that because he might have been in some trouble of his own, he had anything to do with the other business ; and, in fact, he couldn't have had, leaving by the five o'clock train for Birmingham. So we'll dismiss *him*.

"And now for the result ?" concluded Mr. Butterby, with great deliberation. "The result is that I feel inclined to think the young parson may be right in saying it was not a suicide. What it *was*, I can't yet make my mind up to give an opinion upon. Suppose I inquire into things a bit in a quiet manner ? —and, to begin with, I'll make a friendly call on Dicky Jones and madam. She won't an-

swer anything that it does not please her to, and it never pleases her to be questioned ; on the other hand, what she does choose to say is to be relied upon, for she'd not tell a lie to save herself from hanging. As to Dicky—with that long tongue of his, he can be pumped dry."

Mr. Butterby locked up his papers, changed his ornamental coat for a black one, flattened down the coal on his fire, blew out the candles, took his hat, and went away.

CHAPTER VI.

GODFREY PITMAN.

MRS. JONES was in her parlour, doing nothing ; with the exception of dropping a tart observation from her lips occasionally. As the intelligent reader cannot have failed to observe, tartness in regard to tongue was essentially an element of Mrs. Jones's nature ; when anything occurred to annoy her, its signs increased four-fold ; and something had just happened to annoy her very exceedingly.

The parlour was not large, but convenient and well fitted-up. A good fire burnt in the grate, throwing its ruddy light on the bright colours of the crimson carpet and hearth-rug ; on the small sideboard, with its array of glass ; on the horsehair chairs, on the crimson cloth covering the centre table, and finally on Mrs. Jones herself and on her sister.

Mrs. Jones sat at the table, some work before her, in the shape of sundry packages of

hosiery, brought in from the shop to be examined, sorted, and put to rights. But she was not doing it. Miss Rye sat on the other side the table, stitching the seams of a gown-body by the light of the moderator lamp. The shop was just closed.

It had happened that Dicky Jones, about tea-time that evening, had strayed into his next-door neighbour's to get a chat: of which light interludes to business Dicky Jones was uncommonly fond. The bent of the conversation fell, naturally enough, on the recent calamity in Mr. Jones's house: in fact, Mr. Jones found his neighbour devouring the full account of it in the Friday evening weekly newspaper, just damp from the press. A few minutes, and back went Dicky to his own parlour, his mouth full of news: the purport of which was that the lodger, Godfrey Pitman, who had been supposed to leave the house at half-past four, to take the Birmingham train, did not really quit it until some two or three hours later.

It had not been Mrs. Jones if she had refrained from telling her husband to hold his tongue for a fool; and of asking furthermore whether he had been drinking or dreaming. Upon which Dicky gave his authority for what he said. Their neighbour, Thomas

Cause, had watched the lodger go away later, with his own eyes.

Mr. Cause, a quiet tradesman getting in years, was fetched in, and a skirmish ensued. He asserted that he had seen the lodger come out of the house and go up the street by lamplight, carrying his blue bag ; and he persisted in the assertion, in spite of Mrs. Jones's tongue. She declared he had *not* seen anything of the sort ; that either his spectacles or the street lights had deceived him. And neither of them would give in to the other.

Leaving matters in this unsatisfactory state, the neighbour went out again. Mrs. Jones exploded a little, and then had leisure to look at her sister, who had sat still and silent during the discussion. Still and silent she remained ; but her face had turned white, and her eyes wore a wild, frightened expression.

“ What on earth’s the matter with *you* ? ” demanded Mrs. Jones.

“ Nothing,” said Miss Rye, catching hold of her work with nervous, trembling fingers. “ Only I can’t bear to hear it spoken of.”

“ If Mr. Pitman didn’t go away till later, that accounts for the tallow-grease in his room,” suddenly interposed Susan Marks, who, passing into the parlour, caught the thread of the matter in dispute.

Mrs. Jones turned upon her. "Tallow-grease!"

"I didn't see it till this afternoon," explained the girl. "With all the commotion there has been in the house, I never as much as opened the room-door till to-day since Mr. Pittman went out of it. The first thing I see was the carpet covered in drops of tallow-grease; a whole colony of them: and I know they were not there on the Monday afternoon. They be there still."

Mrs. Jones went up-stairs at once, the maid following her. Sure enough the grease drops were there. Some lay on the square piece of carpet, some on the boarded floor; but all were very near together. The candlestick and candle, from which they had no doubt dropped, stood on the wash-hand-stand at Mrs. Jones's elbow, as she wrathfully gazed.

"He must have been lighting of his candle sideways," remarked the girl to her mistress; "or else have held it askew while hunting for something on the floor. If he stopped as late as old Cause says, why in course he'd need a candle."

Mrs. Jones went down again, her temper by no means improved. She did not like to be deceived or treated as though she were nobody; neither did she choose that her house

should be played with. If the lodger missed his train (as she now supposed he might have done) and came back to wait for a later one, his duty was to have announced himself, and asked leave to stay. In spite, however, of the tallow and of Mr. Cause, she put but little faith in the matter. Shortly after this there came a ring at the side-door, and Mr. Butterby's voice was heard in the passage.

"Don't say anything to him about it," said Miss Rye hastily, in a low tone.

"About what?" demanded Mrs. Jones, aloud.

"About that young man's not going away as soon as we thought he did. It's nothing to Butterby."

There was no time for more. Mr. Butterby was shown in and came forward with a small present for Mrs. Jones. It was only a bunch of violets; but Mrs. Jones, in spite of her tartness, was fond of flowers, and received them graciously: calling to Susan to bring a wine-glass of water.

"I passed a chap at the top of High Street with a basket-full; he said he'd sold but two bunches all the evening, so I took a bunch," explained Mr. Butterby. "It was that gardener's man, Reed, who met with the accident and has been unfit for work since. Knowing

you liked violets, Mrs. Jones, I thought I'd just call in with them."

He sat down in the chair, offered him, by the fire, putting his hat in the corner behind. Miss Rye, after saluting him, had resumed work, and sat with her face turned to the table, partially away from his view; Mrs. Jones, at the other side of the table, faced him.

"Where's Jones?" asked Mr. Butterby.

"Jones is off, as usual," replied Jones's wife. "No good to ask where *he* is after the 'shop's shut; often not before it."

It was an unlucky question, bringing back all the acrimony which the violets had partially soothed away. Mr. Butterby coughed, and began talking of recent events in a sociable, friendly manner, just as if he had been Mrs. Jones's brother, and never in his life heard of so rare an animal as a detective.

"It's an uncommon annoying thing to have had happen in your house, Mrs. Jones! As if it couldn't as well have took place in anybody else's! There's enough barristers lodging in the town at assize time, I hope. But there! luck's everything. I'd have given five shillings out of my pocket to have stopped it."

"So would I; for his sake as well as for

mine," was Mrs. Jones's answer. And she seized one of the parcels of stockings, and jerked off the string.

"Have you had any more dreams, Miss Rye?"

"No," replied Miss Rye, holding her stitching closer to the light for a moment. "That one was enough."

"Dreams is curious things; not to be despised," observed crafty Mr. Butterby; than whom there was not a man living despised dreams, as well as those who professed to have them, more than he. "But I've knowed so-called dreams to be nothing in the world but waking thoughts. Are you sure that one of yours was a dream, Miss Rye?"

"I would rather not talk of it, if you please," she said. "Talking cannot bring Mr. Ollivera back to life."

"What makes you persist in thinking he did not kill himself?"

Mr. Butterby had gradually edged his chair forward on the hearthrug, so as to obtain a side view of Miss Rye's face. Perhaps he was surprised, perhaps not, to see it suddenly flush, and then become deadly pale.

"Just look here, Miss Rye. If he did not do it, somebody else did. And I should like to glean a little insight as to whether or not

there are grounds for that new light, if there's any to be gleaned."

"Why, what on earth! are *you* taking up that crotchet, Butterby?"

The interruption came from Mrs. Jones. That goes without telling, as the French say. Mr. Butterby turned to warm his hands at the blaze, speaking mildly enough to disarm an enemy.

"Not I. I should like to show your sister that her suspicions are wrong: she'll worrit herself into a skeleton, else. See here: whatever happened, and how ever it happened, it must have been between half-past seven and eight. You were in the place part of that half-hour, Miss Rye, and heard nobody."

"I have already said so."

"Shut up in your room at the top of the house; looking for—what was it?—a parcel?"

"A pattern—a pattern of a sleeve. But I had to open parcels, for I could not find it, and stayed searching. It had slipped between one drawer and another at the back."

"It must have took you some time," remarked Mr. Butterby, keeping his face on the genial fire and his eyes on Miss Rye.

"I suppose it did. Susan says I was upstairs a quarter of an hour, but I don't think

it was so long as that. Eight o'clock struck after I got back to Mrs. Wilson's."

Mr. Butterby paused. Miss Rye resumed after a minute.

"I don't think anyone could have come in legitimately without my hearing them on the stairs. My room is not at the top of the house, it is on the same floor as Mrs. Jones's; the back room, immediately over the bedroom that was occupied by Mr. Ollivera. My door was open, and the drawers in which I was searching stood close to it. If any——"

"What d'ye mean by legitimate?" interrupted Mr. Butterby, turning to take a full look at the speaker.

"Openly; with the noise one usually makes in coming up stairs. But if any one crept up secretly, of course I should not have heard it. Susan persists in declaring she never lost sight of the front door at all; I don't believe her."

"Nobody does believe her," snapped Mrs. Jones, with a fling at the socks. "She confesses now that she ran in twice or thrice to look to the fires."

"Oh! she does, does she," cried Mr. Butterby. "Leaving the door open, I suppose?"

"Leaving it to take care of itself. She says she shut it; I say I know she didn't.

Put it at the best, it was not fastened ; and anybody might have opened it and walked in that had a mind to, and robbed the house."

The visitor, sitting so unobtrusively by the fire, thought he discerned a little glimmer of possibility breaking in amidst the utter darkness.

"But, as the house was not robbed, why we must conclude nobody did come in," he observed. "As to the verdict—I don't see yet any reason for Miss Rye's disputing it. Mr. Ollivera was a favourite, I suppose."

The remark did not please Miss Rye. Her cheek flushed, her work fell, and she rose from her seat to turn on Mr. Butterby.

"The verdict was a wrong verdict. Mr. Ollivera was a good and brave and just man. Never a better went out of the world."

"If I don't believe you were in love with him!" cried Mr. Butterby.

"Perhaps I was," came the unexpected answer ; but the speaker seemed to be in too much agitation to heed greatly what she said. "It would not have hurt either him or me."

Gathering her work, cotton, scissors in her hands, she went out of the room. At the same moment there arrived an influx of female visitors, come, without ceremony, to get an

hour's chat with Mrs. Jones. Catching up his hat, Mr. Butterby dexterously slipped out and disappeared.

The street was tolerably empty. He took up his position at the edge of the facing pavement, and surveyed the house critically. As if he did not know all its aspects by heart! Some few yards higher up, the dwellings of Mr. Cause and the linendraper alone intervening, there was a side opening, bearing the euphonious title of Bear Entry, which led right into an obscure part of the town. By taking this, and executing a few turnings and windings, the railway station might be approached without touching on the more public streets.

"Yes," said the police agent to himself, calculating possibilities, "that's how it might have been done. Not that it was, though: I'm only putting it. A fellow might have slipped out of the door while that girl was in at her fires, cut down Bear Entry, double back again along Goose Lane, and so gain the rail."

Turning up the street with a brisk step, Mr. Butterby found himself face to face with Thomas Cause, who was standing within the shade of his side door. Exceedingly affable when it suited him to be so, he stopped to say a good evening.

"How d'ye do, Cause? A fine night, isn't it?"

"Lovely weather; shall pay for it later. Has she recovered her temper yet?" continued Mr. Cause. "I saw you come out."

Which was decidedly a rather mysterious addition to the answer. Mr. Butterby naturally enquired what it might mean, and had his ears gratified with the story of Godfrey Pitman's later departure, and of Mrs. Jones's angry disbelief in it. Never had those ears listened more keenly.

"Are you sure it was the man?" he asked cautiously.

"If it wasn't him it was his ghost," said Mr. Cause. "I was standing here on the Monday night, just a step or two for'arder on the pavement, little thinking that a poor gentleman was shooting himself within a few yards of me, and saw a man come out of Jones's side door. When he was close up, I knew him in a moment for the same traveller, with the same blue bag in his hand, that I saw go in with Miss Rye on the Sunday week previous. He came out of the house cautiously, his head pushed forward first, looking up the street and down the street, and then turned out sharp, whisked past me as hard as he could

walk, and went down Bear Entry. It seemed to me that he didn't care to be seen."

But that detectives' hearts are too hard for emotion, this one's might have beaten a little faster as he listened. It was so exactly what he had been fancifully tracing to himself as the imaginary course of a guilty man. Stealing out of the house down Bear Entry, and so up to the railway station !

" What time was it ?"

" What time is it now ?" returned Mr. Cause : and the other took out his watch.

" Five-and-thirty minutes past seven."

" Then it was as nigh the same time on Monday night, as nigh as nigh can be. I shut up my shop at the usual hour, and I'd stood here afterwards just about as long as I've stood here now. I like to take a breath of fresh air, Mr. Butterby, when the labours of the day are over."

" Fresh air's good for all of us—that can get it," said Mr. Butterby, with a sniff at the air around him. " What sort of a looking man was this Godfrey Pitman ?"

" A well-grown, straight man ; got a lot of black hair about his face ; whiskers, and beard, and moustachios."

" Young ?"

" Thirty. Perhaps not so much. In read-

ing the account in the *Herald* this evening, I saw Jones's folks gave evidence that he had left at half-past four to catch the Birmingham train. I told Jones it was a mistake, and he told his wife ; and didn't she fly out ! As if she need have put herself in a tantrum over that ! 'twas a matter of no consequence."

In common with the rest of the town, not a gleam of suspicion that the death was otherwise than the verdict pronounced it to be, had been admitted by Mr. Cause. He went on enlarging on the grievance of Mrs. Jones's attack upon him.

" She'd not hear a word : Jones fetched me in there. She told me to my face that, between spectacles and the deceitful rays of street lamps, one, come to my age, was unable to distinguish black from white, round from square. She said I must have mistaken the gentleman, Mr. Greatorex, for Godfrey Pittman, or else Jones's nephew, both of them having gone out about the same time. I couldn't get in a word edgeways, I assure you, Mr. Butterby, and Dicky Jones can bear me out that I couldn't. Let it go ; 'tis of no moment ; I don't care to quarrel with my neighbours' wives."

Mr. Butterby thought it was of a great deal of moment. He changed the conversa-

tion to something else with apparent carelessness, and then took a leisurely departure. Turning off at the top of High Street, he increased his pace, and went direct to the railway station.

The most intelligent porter employed there was a man named Hall. It was his duty to be on the platform when trains were starting ; and, as the detective had previous cause to know, few of those who departed by them escaped his observation. The eight o'clock train for London was on the point of departure. Mr. Butterby waited under some sheds until it had gone.

Now for Hall, thought he. As if to echo the words, the first person to approach the sheds was Hall himself. In a diplomatic way, Mr. Butterby, when he had made known his presence, began putting enquiries about a matter totally foreign to the one he had come upon.

“ By the way, Hall,” he suddenly said, when the man thought he was done with, “ there was a friend of mine went away last Monday evening, but I’m not sure by which train. I wonder if you happened to see him here ? A well-grown, straight man, with black beard and whiskers—about thirty.”

Hall considered, and shook his head. “ I’ve

no recollection of any one of that description, sir."

"Got a blue bag in his hand. He might have went by the five o'clock train, or later. At eight most likely ; this hour, you know."

"Was he going to London, or the other way, sir ?"

"Can't tell you. Try and recollect."

"Monday ?—Monday ?" cried Hall, endeavouring to recal what he could. "I ought to remember that night, sir, the one of the calamity in High Street ; but the fact is, one day is so much like another here, it's hard to single out any in particular."

"Were you on duty last Sunday week, in the afternoon ?"

"Yes, sir ; it was my Sunday on."

"The man I speak of arrived by train that afternoon, then. You must have seen him."

"So I did," said the porter, suddenly. "Just the man you describe, sir ; and I remember that it struck me I had seen his face somewhere before. It might have been only fancy ; I had not much of a look at him ; he got mixed with the other passengers, and went away quickly. I recollect the blue bag."

"Just so ; all right. Now then, Hall : did you see him leave last Monday evening ?"

"I never saw him, to my recollection, since the time of his arrival. Stop a bit. A blue bag? Why, it was a blue bag that——And that was Monday evening. Wait an instant, sir. I'll fetch Bill."

Leaving the detective to make the most of these detached sentences, Hall hurried off before he could be stopped. Mr. Butterby turned his face to the wall, and read the placards there.

When Hall came back he had a lad with him. And possibly it might have been well for that lad's equanimity, that he was unconscious the spare man, studying the advertisements, was the city's renowned detective, Jonas Butterby.

"Now then," said Hall, "you tell this gentleman about your getting that there ticket, Bill."

"'Twas last Monday evening," began the boy, thus enjoined, "and we was waiting to start the eight o'clock train. In that there dark corner, I comes upon a gentleman set down upon the bench; which he called to me, he did, and says, says he, 'This bag's heavy,' says he, 'and I don't care to carry it further nor I can help, nor yet to leave it,' says he, 'for it's got val'able papers in it,' says he; 'if you'll go and get my ticket for me,' says

he, 'third class to Oxford,' says he, 'I'll give you sixpence,' says he : which I did, and took it to him," concluded the speaker ; " and he give me the sixpence."

" Did he leave by the train ?"

" Why in course he did," was the reply. " He got into the last third class at the tail o' the train, him and his bag ; which were blue, it were."

" An old gentleman, with white hair, was it ?" asked Mr. Butterby, carelessly.

The boy's round eyes opened. " White hair ! Why, 'twas as black as ink. And his beard, too. He warn't old ; he warn't."

Mr. Butterby walked home, ruminating ; stirred up his fire when he arrived, lighted his candles, for he had a habit of waiting on himself, and sat down, ruminating still. Sundry notes and bits of folded paper had been delivered for him from his confrères at the police-station—if Mr. Butterby will not be offended at our classing them with him as such—but he pushed them from him, never opening one. He did not even change his coat for the elegant green-tailed habit, economically adopted for home attire, and he was rather particular in doing so in general. No : Mr. Butterby's mind was ill at ease : not in the sense, be it understood, as applied to

ordinary mortals ; but things were puzzling him.

To give Mr. Butterby his due, he was sufficiently keen of judgment ; though he had made mistakes occasionally. Taking the surface of things only, he might have jumped to the conclusion that a certain evil deed had been committed by Godfrey Pitman ; diving into them, and turning them about in his practised mind, he saw enough to cause him to doubt and hesitate.

“ The man’s name’s as much Pitman as mine is,” quoth he, as he sat looking into the fire, a hand on each knee. “ He arrives here on a Sunday, accosts a stranger he meets accidentally in turning out of the station, which happened to be Alletha Rye, and gets her to accommodate him with a week’s private lodgings. Thought, she says, the house she was standing at was hers : and it’s likely he did. The man was afraid of being seen, was flying from pursuit, and dare not risk the publicity of an inn. Stays in the house nine days, and never stirs out all the mortal time. Makes an excuse of a cold and relaxed throat for stopping in ; which *was* an excuse,” emphatically repeated the speaker. “ Takes leave on the Monday at half-past four, and goes out to

catch the Birmingham train. Is seen to go out. What brought him back?"

The question was not, apparently, easy to solve, for Mr. Butterby was a long while pondering it.

"He couldn't get back into the house up through the windows or down through the chimneys; not in any way but through the door. And the chances were that he might have been seen going in and coming out. No: don't think he went back to harm Mr. Ollivera. Rather inclined to say his announced intention of starting by the five o'clock train to Birmingham was a blind: he meant to go by the one at eight t'other way, and went back to wait for it, afeard of hanging about the station itself or loitering in the streets. It don't quite wash, neither, that; chances were he *might* have been seen coming back," debated Mr. Butterby.

"Wonder if he has anything to do with that little affair that has just turned up in Birmingham?" resumed the speaker, deviating to another thought. "Young man's wanted for that, George Winter: *might* have been this very self-same Godfrey Pitman; and of course *might* not. Let's get on.

"It don't stand to reason that he'd come in any such way into a town and stop a whole

week at the top of a house for the purpose of harming Mr. Ollivera. Why 'twas not till the Tuesday after Pitman was in, that the Joneses got the barrister's letter saying he was coming and would occupy his old rooms if they were vacant. "No," decided Mr. Butterby; "Pitman was in trouble on his own score, and his mysterious movements had reference to that: as I'm inclined to think."

One prominent quality in Mr. Butterby was pertinacity. Let him take up an idea of his own accord, however faint, and it took a vast deal to get it out of him. An obstinate man was he in his self-conceit. Anybody who knew Mr. Butterby well, and could have seen his thoughts as in a glass, might have known he would be slow to take up the doubts against Godfrey Pitman, because he had already them up against another.

"I don't like it," he presently resumed. "Look at it in the best light, she knows something of the matter; more than she likes to be questioned about. Put the case, Jonas Butterby. Here's a sober, sensible, steady young woman, superior to half the women going, thinking only of her regular duties, nothing to conceal, open and cheerful as the day. That's how she was till this happened. And now? Goes home on the Monday night

at nigh eleven o'clock (not to speak yet of what passed up to that hour), sits over the parlour-fire after other folks had went to bed, 'thinking,' as she puts it. Goes up later; can't sleep; drops asleep towards morning, and dreams that Mr. Ollivera's dead. Gets flurried at inquest (*I* saw it, though others mightn't); tramps to see him buried, stands on the fresh grave, and tells the public he did not commit suicide. How does she know he didn't? Come. Mrs. Jones is ten times sharper-sighted, and she has no doubt. Says, next, to her sister in confidence (and Dicky repeats it to me as a choice bit of gossip) that she's haunted by Ollivera's spirit.

"I don't like that," pursued Mr. Butterby, after a revolving pause. "When folks are haunted by dead men's spirits—leastways, fancy they are—it bodes a conscience not at rest in regard to the dead. To-night her face was pale and red by turns; her fingers shook so they had to clutch her work; she won't talk of it; she left the room to avoid me. And," continued Mr. Butterby, "she was the only one, so far as can be yet seen, that was for any length of time in the house between half-past seven and eight on Monday evening. A quarter of an hour finding a sleeve-pattern!"

“I don’t say it was her ; I’ve not got as far as that yet, by a long way. I don’t yet say it was not as the jury brought it in. But she was in the house for that quarter of an hour, unaccounting for her stay in accordance with any probability ; and I’m inclined to think that Godfrey Pitman *must have been out of it before the harm was done*. Nevertheless, appearances is deceitful, deductions sometimes wrong, and while I keep a sharp eye on the lady, I shall look *you* up, Mr. Godfrey Pitman.”

One drawback against the “looking up” was—and Mr. Butterby felt slightly conscious of it as he rose from his seat before the fire—that he had never seen Godfrey Pitman in his life ; and did not know whence he came or whither he might have gone.

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

PART THE SECOND.

THE STORY.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE OFFICE.

THE morning sun was shining on the house of Greatorex and Greatorex. It was a busy day in April. London was filling; people were flocking to town; the season was fairly inaugurated, the law courts were full of life.

The front door stood open; the inner door, closed, could be pushed back at will. It bore a brass plate with the inscription, "Greatorex and Greatorex, Solicitors," and it had a habit, this inner door, of swinging-to upon clients' heels as they went out, for the spring was sharp. In the passage which the door closed in, was a room on either hand. The one on the left was inscribed outside, "Clerks' Office"; that on the right, "Mr. Bede Greatorex."

Mr. Bede Greatorex was in his room to-day: not his private room; that lay beyond. It was

a moderate-sized apartment, the door in the middle, the fire-place opposite to it. On the right, between the door and the near window, was the desk of Mr. Brown ; opposite to it, between the fire-place and far window, stood Mr. Bede Greatorex's desk ; two longer desks ran along the walls towards the lower part of the room. At the one, in a line with that of Mr. Bede Greatorex, the fire-place being between them, sat Mr. Hurst, a gentleman who had entered the house for improvement ; at the one on the other side the door, in a line with Mr. Brown's, sat little Jenner, a paid clerk. Sundry stools and chairs stood about ; a huge map hung above the fire-place ; a stone bottle of ink, some letter-scales, and various other articles more useful than ornamental, were on the mantle-shelf : altogether, the room was about as bare and dull as such offices usually are. The door at the end, marked "Private," opened direct to the private room of Mr. Bede Greatorex, where he held consultations with clients.

And he generally sat there also. It was not very often that he came to his desk in the front office : but he chose to be there on occasions, and this was one. This side of the house was understood to comprise the department of Mr. Bede Greatorex ; some of the clients of

the firm were his exclusively ; that is, when they came they saw him, not his father ; and Mr. Brown was head-clerk and manager under him.

Bede Greatorex (called generally in the office, "Mr. Bede," in contradistinction to his father, Mr. Greatorex) sat looking over some papers taken out of his locked desk. Four years have gone by since you saw him last, reader ; for that prologue to the story with its sad event, was not enacted lately. And the four years have aged him. His father was wont to tell him that he had not got over the shock and grief of John Ollivera's death ; Bede's private opinion was that he never should get over it. They had been as close friends, as dear brothers ; and Bede had been a changed man since. Apart from this grief and regret and the effect it might have left upon him, suspicions had also arisen latterly that Bede Greatorex's health was failing ; in short there were indications, fancied or real, that the inward complaint of which his mother died, might, unless great care were used, creep upon him. Bede had seen a physician, who would pronounce no very positive opinion, but believed on the whole that the fears were without foundation, certainly they were premature.

Another cause that tended to worry Mr. Bede Greatorex, lay in his domestic life. More than three years ago now, he had married Miss Joliffe ; and the world, given you know to put itself into everybody's business and whisper scandal of the best of us, said that in marrying her, Bede Greatorex had got his pill. She was wilful as the wind ; spent his money right and left ; ran him in debt ; plunged into gaiety, show, whirl, all of which her husband hated : she was in fact a perfect, grave exemplification of that undesirable but expressive term that threatens to become a household word in our once sober land—“fast.” Three parts of Bede’s life—the life that lay apart from his profession, his routine of office duties—was spent in striving to keep from his father the extravagance of his wife, and the sums of money he had to draw for personal expenditure. Bede had chivalric ideas upon the point ; he had made her his wife, and would jealously have guarded her failings from all : he would have denied, had he been questioned, that she had any. So far as he was able he would indulge her whims and wishes ; but there was one of them that he could not and did not : and that related to their place of dwelling. Bede had brought his wife to the home that had been his mother’s,

to be its sole mistress in his late mother's place. It was a large, convenient, handsome residence (as was previously seen), replete with every comfort; but after a time Mrs. Bede Greatorex grew discontented. She wanted to be in a more fashionable quarter; Hyde Park, Belgrave Square; anywhere amidst the great world. After their marriage Bede had taken her abroad; and they remained so long there that Mr. Greatorex began to indulge a private opinion that Bede was never coming back again. They sojourned in Paris, in Switzerland, in Germany; and though, when they at length did return, Bede laughingly said he could not get Louisa home, he had in point of fact been as ready to linger away from it as she was. The Bedford Square house had been done up beautifully, and for two years Mrs. Bede found no fault with it; she had taken to do that lately, and it seemed to grow upon her like a mania.

Upstairs now, now at this very moment, when her husband is poring over his law-puzzles with bent brow, she is studying the advertisements of desirable houses in the *Times*, almost inclined to go out and take one on her own account. A charming one (to judge by the description) was to be had in Park Lane, rent only six hundred a-year, un-

furnished. Money was as plentiful as sand in the idea of Mrs. Bede Greatorex.

You can go and see her. Through the passages and the intervening door to the other house ; or else go out into the street and make a call of state at the private entrance. Up the wide staircase to the handsome landing-place already told of, with its rich green carpet, its painted windows, its miniature conservatory, and its statues ; on all of which the sun is shining as brightly as it was that other day four years ago, when Bede Greatorex came home, fresh from the unhappy scenes connected with the death of Mr. Ollivera. Not into the dining-room ; there's no one in it ; there's no one in the large and beautiful drawing-room ; enter, first of all, a small apartment on the side that they call the study.

At the table sat Jane Greatorex, grown into a damsel of twelve, but exceedingly little and childlike in appearance. She was writing French dictation. By her side, speaking the words in a slow, distinct tone, with a good and pure accent, sat a young lady, her face one of the sweetest it was ever man's lot to look upon. The hazel eyes were deep, honest, steady ; the auburn hair lay lightly away from delicate and well-carved features ; the complexion was pure and bright. A slender girl

of middle height, and gentle, winning manners, whose simple morning dress of light cashmere sat well upon her.

Surely that modest, good, thoughtful young woman could not be Mrs. Bede Greatorex ! No : you must wait yet an instant for introduction to her. That is only Miss Jane's governess, a young lady who has but recently entered on her duties as such, and is striving to perform them conscientiously. She is very patient, although the little girl is excessively tiresome, with a strong will of her own, and a decided objection to lessons of all kinds. She is the more patient because she remembers what a tiresome child she was herself, at that age, and the vast amount of trouble she gave wilfully to her sister-governess.

“ No, Jane ; it is not *facture* ; it is *facteur*. We are speaking of a postman, you know. The two words are essentially different ; different in meaning, in spelling, and in sound. I explained this to you yesterday.”

“ I don’t like doing dictation, Miss Channing,” came the answering response.

“ Go on, please. Le facteur, qui ——”

“ I’m tired to death. I know I’ve done a whole page.”

“ You have done three lines. One of these days I will give you a whole page to do, and

then you'll know what a whole page is. Le facteur, qui arrive ——”

Miss Jane Greatorex suddenly took a large penful of ink, and shook it deliberately on the copy-book. Leaving them to the contest, in which be you very sure the governess would conquer, for she was calm, kind, and firm, we will go to an opposite room, one that Mrs. Bede called her boudoir. A beautiful room, its paper and panelling of white and gold, its velvet carpet of delicate tints, its silk curtains of a soft rose-colour. But neither Mrs. Bede Greatorex, who sat there, nor her attire was in accordance with the room.

And, to say the truth, she had only come down from her chamber to get something left in it the night before: it was her favourite morning room, but Mrs. Bede was not wont to take up her position in it until made up for the day. And that was not yet accomplished. Her dark hair was untidy, her face pale and pasty, her dressing-gown, of a dull red with gold sprigs on it, sat loose. Seeing the *Times* on the table, she had caught it up, and thrown herself back in a reclining chair of satin-wood and pink velvet, while she looked over the advertisements. Mrs. Bede Greatorex was tall and showy, and there her beauty ended. As Louisa Joliffe, she had exercised

a charm of manner that fascinated many, but she kept it for rare occasions now ; and, they, always public ones. She had no children, and her whole life and being were wrapt in fashion, frivolity, and heartlessness. The graver duties of existence were wholly neglected by Louisa Greatorex : she seemed to live in ignorance that such things were. She never so much as glanced at the solemn thought that there must come a life after this life ; she never for a moment strove to work on for it, or to help another on the pilgrimage : had she chosen to search her memory, it could not have returned to her the satisfaction of having ever performed a kind action.

One little specimen of her selfishness, her utter disregard for the claims and feelings of others, shall be given, for it occurred opportunely. As she sat, newspaper in hand, a young woman opened the door, and asked leave to speak to her. She was the lady's maid, and, as Mrs. Bede looked at her, knitting her brow at the request, she saw tears stealing down from the petitioning eyes.

“ Could you please let me go out, madam ? A messenger has come to say that my mother is taken suddenly worse : they think she is dying.”

"You can go when I am dressed," replied Mrs. Bede Greatorex.

"Oh, madam, if you could please to let me go at once ! I may not be in time to see her. Eliza says she will take my place this morning, if you will allow her."

"You can go when I am dressed," was the reiterated, cold, and decisive answer. "You hear me, Tallet. Shut the door." And the maid withdrew, her face working with its vain yearning.

"She's always wanting to go out to her mother," harshly spoke Mrs. Bede Greatorex, as she settled herself to the newspaper again.

"One ; two ; three ; four ; five. Five houses that seem desirable. Bede may say what he chooses : in this miserable old house, with its professional varnish, we don't stay. I'll write at once for particulars," she added, going to her writing-table, a costly piece of furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

The writing for particulars took her some little time, three-quarters of an hour about, and then she went up to be dressed ; which ceremony occupied nearly an hour longer. Tallet might depart then. And thus you have a specimen of the goodness of heart of Louisa Greatorex.

But this has been a digression from the morning's business, and we must return to the husband, whose wish and will she would have liked to defy, and to the office where he sat. The room was very quiet ; nothing to be heard in it but the scratching of three pens ; Mr. Brown's, Mr. Hurst's, and Mr. Jenner's. This room was not entered indiscriminately by callers ; the opposite door inscribed "Clerks' Office," was on the swing perpetually. This room was a very sedate one : as a matter of course so in the presence of Mr. Bede Greatorex ; and the head of it in his absence, Mr. Brown, allowed no opportunity for discursive gossip. He was as efficient a clerk as Greatorex and Greatorex had ever possessed ; young yet : a tall, slender, silent man, devoted to his business ; about three years, or so, with them now. He wore a wig of reddish brown, and his whiskers and the hair on his chin were sandy.

Bede Greatorex shut some papers into his desk with a click, and began opening another parchment. "Did you get an answer yesterday, from Garnett's people, Mr. Hurst?" he suddenly asked.

"No, sir. I could not see them."

"Their clerk came in last evening to say we should hear from them to-day," interposed

Mr. Brown, looking up from his writing to speak.

It was in these moments—when the clerk's eyes unexpectedly met those of Mr. Bede Greatorex—that the latter would feel a kind of disagreeable sensation shoot through him. Over and over again had it occurred : the first time when Mr. Brown had been in the office but a day. They were standing talking together on that occasion, when a sudden fancy took Bede that he had seen the man somewhere before. It was not to be called a recognition ; but a kind of semi-recognition, vague, indefinite, uncertain, and accompanied by a disagreeable feeling, which had its rise perhaps in the very uncertainty.

“Have we ever met before ?” Mr. Bede Greatorex had questioned ; but Mr. Brown shook his head, and could not say. A hundred times since then, when he met the steady gaze of those remarkably light grey eyes (nearly always bent on their work), had Bede stealthily continued to study the man ; but the puzzle was always there.

Mr. Brown's eyes and face were bent on his desk again to-day. His master, holding a sheet of parchment up before him, as if to study the writing better, suffered his gaze to

wander over its top and fix itself on Mr. Brown. The clerk, happening to glance up unguardedly, caught it.

He was one of the most observant men living, quiet though he seemed, and could not fail to be aware that he was thus occasionally subjected to the scrutiny of his master—but he never appeared to see it.

“Did you speak, sir?” he asked, as if he had looked up to ask the question.

“I was about to speak,” said Mr. Bede Greatorex. “There’s a new clerk coming in to-day to replace Parkinson. Nine o’clock was the hour fixed, and now it is half-past ten. If this is a specimen of his habits of punctuality, I fear he’ll not do much good. You will place him at Mr. Hurst’s desk.”

“Very good, sir,” replied Mr. Brown, making no comment. The out-going clerk, Parkinson, had been at Jenner’s desk.

“I am going over to Westminster,” continued Mr. Bede Greatorex, gathering some papers in his hand. “If Garnett’s people come in, they must wait for me. By the way, what about that deed——”

The words were cut short by a clatter. A clatter and bustle of feet and doors ; some one was dashing in from the street in a desperate hurry, with a vast deal of unnecessary noise.

First the swing-door gave a bang, then the clerks' door opened and banged ; now this one was sent back with a breeze ; and a tall fine-looking young man came bustling in, head foremost—Mr. Roland Yorke.

Not so very young, either. For more than seven years have elapsed since he was of age, and went careering off on a certain hopeful voyage of his to Port Natal, told of in history. He is changed since then. The overgrown young fellow of twenty-one, angular and awkward, has become quite a noble-looking man in his great strength and height. The face is a fine one, good-nature the predominant expression of the somewhat rough features, which are pale and clear and healthy : the indecision that might once have been detected in his countenance, has given place to earnestness now. Of regular beauty in his face, as many people count beauty, there is none ; but you would scarcely pass him in the street without turning to look at him. In manner he is nearly as much of a boy as a grown man can be, just as he ever was, hasty, thoughtless, and impulsive.

“ I know I’m late,” he began. “ How d’ye do, Mr. Greatorex ?”

“ Yes, you are late, Mr. Yorke,” was the response of Mr. Bede Greatorex, submitting

to the hearty hand-shake offered. " Nine was the hour named."

" It was the boat's fault," returned Roland, speaking with loud independence, just as he might had he been a ten thousand a-year client of the house. " I went down to see Carrick off at eight o'clock, and if you'll believe me, the vessel never got away before ten. They were putting horses on board. Carrick says they'll lose their tide over yonder ; but he didn't complain, he's as easy as an old shoe. Since then I've had a pitch out of a hansom cab."

" Indeed !"

" I told the fellow to drive like mad ; which he did ; and down went the horse, and I out a-top of him, and the man a-top of me. There was no damage, only it all served to hinder. But I'm ready for work now, Mr. Greatorex. Which is to be my place ?"

To witness a new clerk announce himself in this loud, familiar kind of way, to see him grasp and shake the hand of Mr. Bede Greatorex : above all to hear him speak unceremoniously of the Earl of Carrick, one of the house's noble clients, as if the two were hail-fellow-well-met, caused the whole office to look up, even work-absorbed Mr. Brown. Bede Greatorex indicated the appointed desk.

“ This is where you will be, by the side of Mr. Hurst, a gentleman who is with us for improvement. Mr. Brown, the manager in this room”—pointing out the clerk with the end of his pen—“ will assign you your work. Mr. Hurst, Mr. Roland Yorke.”

Roland took his seat at once, and turned up his coat-cuffs as a preliminary step to industry. Mr. Bede Greatorex, saying no more, passed through to his private room, and after a minute was heard to go out.

“ What’s to do ?” asked Roland.

Mr. Brown was already giving him something ; a deed to be copied. He spoke a few instructions in a concise, quiet tone, and Roland Yorke set to work.

“ What ink d’ye call this ?” began Roland.

“ It is the proper ink,” said Mr. Brown.

“ It’s uncommon bad.”

“ Have you ever been used to the kind of work, Mr. Yorke ?” enquired the manager, wondering whether the new comer might be a qualified solicitor, brought to grief, or a gentleman-embryo just entering on his noviciate.

“ Oh, haven’t I !” returned Mr. Yorke ; “ I was in a proctor’s office once, where I was worked to death.”

“ Then you’ll soon find that to be good ink.”

"I had all the care of the office on my shoulders," resumed Roland, holding the pen in the air, and sitting back on his stool while he addressed Mr. Brown. "There were three of us in the place altogether, not counting the old proctor himself, and we had enough work for six. Well, circumstances occurred to take the other two out of the office, and I, who was left, had to do it all. What do you think of that?"

Mr. Brown did not say what he thought. He was writing steadily, giving no encouragement for the continuance of the conversation. Mr. Hurst, his elbow on the desk, had his face turned to the speaker, surveying him at leisure.

"I couldn't stand it; I should have been in my grave in no time; and so I thought I'd try a part of the world that might be more desirable—Port Natal. I say, what are you staring at?"

This was to Mr. Hurst. The latter dropped his elbow as he answered.

"I was looking whether you were much altered. You are: and yet I think I should have known you, after a bit, for Roland Yorke. When the name was mentioned I might have been at fault, but for your speaking of Lord Carrick."

"He's my uncle," said Roland. "Who are you?"

"Jos Hurst, from Helstonleigh. Have you forgotten me? I was at the college school with your brothers, Gerald and Tod."

Roland stared. He had not forgotten Josiah Hurst; but the rather short and very broad young man by his side, as broad as he was high, bore no resemblance to the once slim college boy. Roland never doubted: he got off his stool, upsetting it in the process, to shake heartily the meeting hand. Mr. Brown began to think the quiet of the office would not be much enhanced through its new inmate.

"My goodness! you are the first of the old fellows I've seen. And what are you, Hurst,—a lawyer?"

"Yes; I've passed. But the old doctor (at home, you know) won't buy me a practice, or let me set up for myself, or anything, until I've had some experience: and so I have come to Greatorex and Greatorex to get it," concluded Mr. Hurst, ruefully.

"And who's he?" continued Roland, pointing to Jenner. "Greatorex said nothing about him."

He was one of the least men ever seen, but he had a vast amount of work in him. Mr.

Hurst explained that Jenner was only a clerk, but a very efficient one.

“He’d do twice the amount of work that I could, Yorke : I’m slow and sure ; Jenner is sure and quick. How long have you been home from Port Natal ?”

“Don’t bother about that now,” said Roland.

“Did you make your fortune out there ?”

“What a senseless question ! If I’d made a fortune there, it stands to reason I should not have to come into an office here.”

“How was I to know ? You might have made a fortune and dissipated it ?”

“Dissipated it in what ?” cried Roland, with wide-open eyes. And to Mr. Hurst, who had gained some knowledge of what is called life, the look and the question bore earnest that Roland Yorke, in spite of his travelling experiences, was not much tainted by the world and its ways.

“Oh, in many things. Horse-racing, for instance.”

Roland threw back his head in the old emphatic manner. “If ever I *do* get a fortune, Jos,—which appears about as likely as that Port Natal and Ireland should join hands and spin a waltz with each other—I’ll take care of it.”

Possibly in the notion occurring to him that idleness was certainly not the best way to acquire a fortune, Roland tilted his stool on its even legs, and began to work in earnest. When he had accomplished two lines, he took it to the manager.

“Will this do, Mr. Brown? I’m rather out of practice.”

Mr. Brown signified that it would. He knew his business better than to give anything of much consequence to an unknown and untried clerk.

“Are you related to Sir Richard Yorke?” he asked of Roland.

“Yes, I am; and I’m ashamed of him. Old Dick’s my uncle, my late father’s brother; and his son and heir, young Dick, is my cousin. Old Dick is the greatest screw alive; he’d not help a fellow to save him from hanging. He’s as poor as Carrick; but I don’t call that an excuse for him; his estate is mortgaged up the neck.”

Mr. Brown needed not the additional information, which Roland proffered so candidly. His nature had not changed a whit. Nay, perhaps the free and easy life at Port Natal, about which we may hear somewhat later, had only tended to render him less reticent, if that were possible. Greatorex and Greatorex were

the confidential solicitors to Sir Richard Yorke, and Mr. Brown was better acquainted than Roland with the baronet's finances.

"I thought it must be so," remarked Mr. Brown. "I knew there was some connection between Sir Richard and Lord Carrick. Are you likely to stay in our office long?" he questioned, inwardly wondering that Roland with two uncles so puissant should be there at all.

"I'm likely to stay for ever, for all I know. They are going to give me twenty shillings a week. I say, Mr. Brown, why do you wear a wig?"

Doubtless Mr. Brown thought the question a tolerably pointed one upon so brief an acquaintance. He settled to his work again without answering it. A hint that the clerk, just come under his wing, might return and settle to his. Which was not taken.

"My hair is as plentiful as ever it was," said Roland, giving his dark hair a push backwards. "I don't want a wig; and you can't be so very much my senior; six or seven years, perhaps. I'm eight-and-twenty."

"And I am three-and-thirty, sir. My hair came off in a fever a few years back, and it does not grow again. Be so good as to get on with what you have to do, Mr. Yorke."

Thus admonished, Roland obediently sought

his place. And what with renewed questions to Mr. Brown—that came ringing out at the most unexpected moments—what with a few anecdotes of life at Port Natal with which he confidently regaled Mr. Hurst, what with making the acquaintance of little Jenner, which Roland accomplished with great affability, and what with slight interludes of writing, a line here and a line there, the morning wore away agreeably.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARRIVAL FROM PORT NATAL.

MR. ROLAND YORKE'S emigration to Port Natal cannot be said to have turned out a success. He had gone off in high spirits, a chief cabin passenger, Lord Carrick having paid the passage-money, forty pounds. He had carried with him, from the same good-natured source, fifty pounds, to begin life with when he should land, a small but sufficient outfit, and a case of merchandize consisting of frying-pans. Seven years before, when Roland resolved to emigrate and run away from work at home, he became imbued with the conviction (whence derived, he scarcely knew, but it lay on his mind as a positive certainty) that frying-pans formed the best and most staple article on which to commence trading at Port Natal, invariably laying the foundation of a fortune. Some friend of his, a Mr. Bagshaw, who had previously emigrated, had imparted this secret to him ; at least, Roland was im-

pressed with the belief that he had; a belief which nothing could shake. Frying-pans and fortune were associated together in his dreams. He stood out strongly for the taking out forty dozen, but Lord Carrick declined to furnish them, allowing only the miserable number of four-and-twenty. "When ye see for ye'reself out there that there's a market for them, send me word, and I'll dispatch loads to ye by the first steamer, me boy," said his lordship sensibly; and Roland was fain to put up with the advice and with the two dozen accorded. He arrived at Port Natal, all youth and joy and buoyancy. Seen from the deck of the vessel, when she anchored in the beautiful harbour, calm as a lake, Natal looked a very paradise. Ranges of hills on the west of the fair town were dotted with charming houses and pleasure-grounds; and Roland landed fresh and full of hope as a summer's morning: just as too many an emigrant from the dear old mother-country does land, at other parts besides Natal. And he bought experience as they do.

In the first place, Roland began life there as he had been accustomed to do it in England; that is, as a gentleman. In the second place there proved to be no especial market for frying-pans. That useful culinary article

might be bought in sufficient abundance, he found, when inquired for, without bringing into requisition the newly-arrived supply. The frying-pans being thus left upon his hands, lying like a dead weight on them, metaphorically speaking, brought the first check to his hopes ; for they had been relied upon (as the world knows) to inaugurate and establish the great enterprizes, commercial or otherwise, that had floated in rose-coloured visions through Roland's brain. He quitted the port town, Durban, and went to Maritzburg, fifty miles off, and then came back to Durban. Thrown upon his own resources (through the failure of the frying-pans), Roland had leisure to look about him, for some other fertile source in which to embark his genius and energy, and lead him on to speedy fortune. Such resources did not appear to be going begging ; they were coyly shy ; or at least came not flowing in Roland's way ; and meanwhile his money melted. Partly in foolish expenditure on his own account, partly in helping sundry poor wights, distressed steerage passengers with whom he had made acquaintance on board (for Roland had brought out his good-nature with him), the money came to a summary end. One fine morning, Roland woke up from a dream of idle carelessness,

to find himself changing the last sovereign of all the fifty. It did not dismay him very much: all he said was, "I must set about money-making in earnest now."

Of course the great problem was—how to do it. You, my reader, may be, even now, trying to solve it. Thousands of us are, every day. Roland Yorke made but one more of a very common experience; and he had to encounter the usual rubs incidental to the process. He came to great grief and was reduced to a crust; nay, to the not knowing where the crust could be picked up from. The frying-pans went first, disposed of in a job lot, almost literally for an old song. Some man who owned a shed had, for a consideration, housed the case that contained them, and they were eating their handles off. Roland's wardrobe went next, piecemeal; and things fell to the pass that Roland was not sure but he himself would have to go after it. It came to one of two things—starvation or work. To do Roland justice, he was ready and willing to work; but he knew no mechanical trade; he had never done an hour's hard labour, and in that lay the difficulty of getting it. He would rush about from office to store, hunger giving him earnestness, from store to workshop, from workshop to bench, and say,

Employ me. For the most part, the answer would be that he was not wanted ; the labour market of all kinds was overstocked ; but if the application appeared, by rare chance, likely to be entertained, and Roland was questioned of his experience and capabilities, rejection was sure to follow. He was too honest, too shallow in the matter of tact, to say he had been accustomed to work when he had not ; and the experience in copying which he acknowledged and put forth, was somehow never required to be tested. To hear Roland tell of what he had accomplished in this line at home, must have astonished the natives of Port Natal.

Well, time went on ; it does not stand still for any one ; and Roland went on with it, down and down and down. Years went on ; and one rainy day, when about four winters had gone by from the date of his departure, Roland returned to England. He landed in St. Katharine's Docks, his coat out at elbows and ninepence in his pocket : as an old friend of his, Mr. Galloway, had once prophesied he would land, if he lived to get back at all.

Mr. Roland Yorke had sailed for Port Natal in style, a first-class cabin passenger ; he came home in the steerage, paying twelve pounds for the passage, and working out part of that.

From thence he made his way to Lord Carrick in Ireland, very much like a bale of returned goods.

The best account he gave of his travels to Lord Carrick, perhaps the best account he could give, was that he had been “knocking about.” Luck had not been with him, he said : and there really did seem to have been a good deal in that. To hear him tell of his adventures was something rich ; not consecutively as a history, he never did that : but these chance recollections were so frequent and diffuse, that a history of his career at Natal might have been compiled from them. The Earl would hold his sides, laughing at Roland’s lamentations for the failure and sacrifice of his frying-pans, and at the reminiscences in general. A life of adventure one week, a life of starvation the next. Roland said he had tried all kinds of things. He had served in stores ; at bars where liquor was dispensed ; he had been a hired waiter at half the hotels in Natal ; he had worked on the shore with the half-naked Zulu Kaffirs at lading and unlading boats ; once, for a whole week, when he was very hard up, or perhaps very low *down*, he had cried hot potatoes in the streets. He had been a farmer’s labourer and driven a waggon, pigs, and cattle. He

had been sub-editor in a newspaper office, *The Natal Mercury*, and one unlucky day sent the journal out with its letters printed upside down. He had hired himself out as chemist's assistant, and half ruined his master by his hopeless inability to distinguish between senna and tincture of laudanum, so that the antidotes obliged to be supplied to the hapless customers who came rushing for them, quite outweighed the profits. Occasionally he met with friends who assisted him, and then Roland was at ease—for his propensity to live as a gentleman was for ever cropping up. Up and down ; down and up ; now fortune smiling a little, but for the most part showing herself very grim, and frowning terribly. Roland had gone (as he called it) up the country, and amidst other agreeable incidents came to a fight with the Kaffirs. He took out a licence, the cost thirty shillings, and opened a retail store for pickled pork, candles, and native leeches, the only articles he could get supplied him on trust. His fine personal appearance, ready address, evident scholarship, and hearty frank manners, obtained for him a clerkship in the Commercial and Agricultural Bank, recently opened, and he got into so hopeless a maze with the books and cash by the week's end, that he was turned off with-

out pay. Architecture was tried next. Roland sent in a graphic plan as competitor for the erection of a public building; and the drawing—which he had copied from a model, just as he used to copy cribs in the college school at Helstonleigh—looked so well upon paper that the arbitrators were struck with admiration at the constructive talent displayed, until one of them made the abrupt discovery that there were no staircases, and no room left to build any. So, that hope was abandoned for a less exalted one; and Roland was glad to become young man at a general store, where the work was light: alternating between dispensing herrings and treacle (called there golden syrup) to customers over the counter, and taking out parcels in a wheelbarrow.

But there was good in Roland. And a great deal of it too, in spite of his ill-luck and his careless improvidence. The very fact of his remaining away four years, striving manfully with this unsatisfactory life of toil and semi-starvation, proved it. The brown bread and pea-soup Mr. Galloway had foreseen he would be reduced to live on, was often hungered for by Roland in vain. He put up with it all; and not until every chance seemed to have failed, would he go home to tax his

uncle's pocket, and to disappoint his mother. A sense of shame, of keen, stinging mortification, no doubt lay at the bottom of this feeling against return. He had been so sanguine, as some of my readers may remember ; and as he, sitting one day on a roadside stone in the sand, towards the close of his stay in Natal, recalled ; so full of hopeful, glowing visions in the old home, that his mother, the Lady Augusta Yorke, had caught their reflection. Roland's castles in the air cannot have slipped yet out of people's memory. He had represented to his mother ; aye, and believed it, too ; that Port Natal was a kind of Spanish El Dorado, where energetic young men might line their pockets in a short while, and come home millionaires for life. He had indulged large visions and made magnificent promises on the strength of them, beginning with a case of diamonds to his mother, and ending—nobody but Roland could have any conception where. Old debts were to be paid, friends benefited, enemies made to eat humble-pie. Mr. Galloway was to be passed in the street by Mr. Roland Yorke, the millionaire ; the Reverend William Yorke to have the cold shoulder turned upon him. Arthur Channing was to be honoured ; Jenkins, the hard-working clerk, who had thought nothing of doing

Roland's work as well as his own, to be largely patronised ; within three months after his arrival in Port Natal, funds were to be despatched home to settle claims that might be standing against Roland in Helstonleigh. That there could be the slightest doubt he should come back "worth millions," Roland never supposed ; he had talked of it everywhere—and talked faithfully. Poor Jenkins had long gone where worldly patronage and gifts could not follow him, but others had not. Roland remembered how his confident anticipations had so won upon his mother, that she went to bed and dreamt of driving about a charming city, whose streets were paved with Malachite marble.

And so, recalling these visions and promises, Roland, for very disappointment and shame, was not in a hurry to go back, but rather lingered on in Port Natal, struggling manfully with his ill-luck, as he called it. Pride and good-feeling alike prevented him. To appear before Lady Augusta, poor, starving, hatless, and bootless, would be undoubtedly a worse blow to her than that other alternative which he (forgetting his height and weight) had laid before her view : the one, he said, might happen if he did *not* get to Port Natal—the

riding as a jockey on Helstonleigh race-course, in a pink silk jacket and yellow breeches.

No. He did try heartily with all his might and main ; tried at it for four mortal years. Beyond a scrap of writing he now and again sent home, in which he always said he was “well, and happy, and keeping straight, and getting on,” but which never contained a request for home news, or an address to which it might be sent, Lady Augusta heard nothing. Nobody else heard. One letter, indeed, reached a bosom friend of his, Arthur Channing, which was burnt when read, as requested, and Arthur looked grieved for a month after. He had told Arthur the truth ; that he was not getting on ; but under an injunction of secrecy, and giving no details. Beyond that, no news reached home of Roland.

His fourth year of trial at Port Natal was drawing to a close when illness seized hold of him, and for the first time Roland felt as if he were losing heart. It was not serious illness, only such as is apt to attack visitors to the country, and from which Roland’s strength of frame, sound constitution, and good habits—for he had no bad ones, unless a great appetite might be called such—had hitherto preserved him. But, what with the wear and tear of his chequered life, its uncertain food,

a plentiful dinner to-day, bread and beans to-morrow, nothing the following one, and its harassing and continuous disappointments, Roland felt the illness as a depressing calamity ; and he began to say he could not make head against the tide any longer, and must get away from it. He might have to eat humble-pie on landing in England ; but humble-pie seems tolerable or nauseous according to the existing state of mind ; and it is never utterly poisonous to one of the elastic temperament of Roland Yorke. In a fit of impulse he went down to the ships and made the best bargain for getting home that circumstances allowed. He had been away more than four years, and never once, during that time, had he written home for money.

And so, behold him, out at pocket (except for ninepence) and out at elbows, but wonderfully improved in tone and physique, arriving in London early one rainy morning from Port Natal, and landing in the docks.

The first thing he did was to divide the ninepence with one who was poorer than he ; the second was to get a cup of coffee and a slice of bread at a street coffee-stall ; the third was to hasten to Lord Carrick's tailor—and a tremendous walk it was, but that was nothing to Roland—and get rigged out in any second-

hand suit of clothes returned on hand that might be decent. There ill news awaited him ; it was the time of year when Lord Carrick might, as a rule, be found in London ; but he had not come ; he was, the tailor believed, in Ireland. Roland at once knew, as sure as though it had been told him, that his uncle was in some kind of pecuniary hot water. Borrowing the very smallest amount of money that would take him to Ireland, he went off down the Thames in a return cattle-boat that very day.

Since that period, hard upon three years, he had been almost equally “knocking about,” and experienced nearly as many ups and downs in Ireland as at Port Natal. Sometimes living in clover with Lord Carrick, at others thrown on his own resources and getting on somehow. Lord Carrick’s will was good to help him, but not always his ability ; now and again it had happened that his lordship (who was really more improvident than his nephew, and had to take flights to the Continent on abrupt emergencies and without a day’s warning) was lost to society for a time, even to Roland. Roland hired himself out as a kind of overseer to some absentee’s estate, but he could not get paid for it. This part of his career need not be traced ; on the whole, he did still

strive to do something for himself as strenuously as he had at Port Natal, and not to be a burthen to anybody, even to Lord Carrick.

To this end he came over to London, and presented himself one day to his late father's brother, Sir Richard Yorke, and boldly asked him if he could not "put him into something." The request caused Sir Richard (an old gentleman with a fat face) to stare immensely ; he was very poor and very selfish, and had persistently held himself aloof from his late brother's needy family, keeping them always at arm's length. His son and heir had been content to do the same : in truth, the cousins did not know each other by sight. Sir Richard's estate was worth four thousand a-year, all told ; and as he was wont to live at the rate of six, it will be understood that he was never in funds. Neither had he patronage or influence in any way. To be thus summarily applied to by a stalwart young man, who announced himself as his nephew, took the baronet aback ; and if he did not exactly turn Roland out of the house, his behaviour was equivalent to it. "I'll be shot if I ever go near him again," cried Roland. "I'd rather cry hot pies in Poplar streets."

A day or two previously, in sauntering

about parts of London least frequented by men of the higher class—for when we are very much down in the world we don't exactly choose the region of St. James's for our promenades, or the sunny side of Regent Street—Roland had accidentally met one of the steerage passengers with whom he had voyaged home from Port Natal. Ever open-hearted, he had frankly avowed the reason of being unable to treat his friend; namely, empty pockets: he was not sure, he added, but he must take to crossing-sweeping for a living; he heard folks made fortunes at it. Upon this the gentleman, who wore no coat and very indifferent pantaloons, confided to him the intelligence that there was a first-rate opening in the perambulating hot-pie trade, down in Poplar, for an energetic young man with a sonorous voice. Roland, being great in the latter gift, thought he might entertain it.

Things were at a low ebb just then with Roland. Lord Carrick, as usual, was totally destitute of ready money; and Roland, desperately anxious though he was to get along of his own accord, was fain to write to his mother for a little temporary help. One cannot live upon air in London, however that desirable state of things may be accomplished at Port Natal. But the application was made

at an inopportune moment. Every individual boy Lady Augusta possessed was then tugging at her purse strings ; and she returned a sharp answer to Roland, telling him he ought to be ashamed of himself not to be helping her, now that he was the eldest, instead of wanting her to keep him. George, the eldest son, had died in India, which brought Roland first.

“ It’s true,” said Roland, in a reflective mood, “ I ought to be helping her. I wonder if Carrick could put me into anything, as old Dick won’t. Once let me get a start, I’m bound to go on, and the mother should be the first to benefit by it.”

A short while after this, and when Roland was far more at his wits’ end for a shilling than he had ever been at Port Natal—for there he had no appearance to keep up, and here he had ; there he could encamp out in the sand, here he couldn’t—Lord Carrick arrived suddenly in London, in a little trouble as usual. Some warm-hearted friend had induced his good-natured lordship to accept a short bill, and afterwards treacherously left him to meet it. So Lord Carrick was again en route for the Continent, until his men of business, Greatorex and Greatorex, could arrange the affair for him by finding the neces-

sary money. Halting in London a couple of days, to confer with them on that and other matters—for Lord Carrick's affairs altogether were complicated and could not be touched upon in an hour—Roland seized on the opportunity to prefer the application. And this brings us to the present time.

When under a cloud, and not quite certain that the streets were safe, the Earl was wont to eschew his hotel at the west end, and put up at a private one in a more obscure part. Roland, having had notice of his arrival, clattered in to breakfast with him on the morning of the second day, and entered on his petition forthwith—to be put into something.

“Anything for a start, Uncle Carrick,” he urged. “No matter how low I begin: I'll soon go along swimmingly, once I get the start. I can't go about here, you know, with my toes out, as I have over yonder. It's awful work getting a dinner only once a week. I've had thoughts of crying hot pies in Poplar.”

To judge by the breakfast Roland was eating, he had been a week without that meal as well as dinner. Lord Carrick, looking at the appetite with admiration, sat pulling his white whiskers in perplexity; for the grey hair of seven years ago had become white now. His

heart was good to give Roland the post of Prime Minister, or any other trifling office, but he did not see his way clear to accomplish it.

"Me boy, there's only one thing I can do for ye just now," he said after silently turning the matter about in all its bearings, and hearing the explanation of the Poplar project. "Ye know I must be off to-morrow by the early French steamer, and I can't go about looking after places to-day, even if I knew where they could be picked up, which I don't. I must leave ye to Greatorex and Greatorex."

"What will they do?" asked Roland.

"You can come along with me there, and see."

Accordingly, when the Earl of Carrick went forth to his appointed interview that day with Mr. Greatorex, he presented Roland; and simply told the old lawyer that he must put him in a way of getting along, until he, Lord Carrick, was in funds again. Candid and open as ever Roland could be, the Earl made no secret whatever of that gentleman's penniless state, enlarging on the fact that to go dinnerless, as a rule, could not be good for him, and that he should not exactly like to see him set up as a hot-pie man in Poplar. Mr. Greatorex, perhaps nearly as much taken to as Sir

Richard Yorke had been on a similar occasion, glanced at his son Bede who was present, and hesitated. He did not refuse point blank—as he might have done by almost anybody else. Lord Carrick was a valuable client, his business yearly bringing in a good share of feathers to the Greatorex nest, and old Mr. Greatorex was sensible of the fact. Still, he did not see what he could do for one who, like Roland, was in the somewhat anomalous position of being nephew to an earl and a baronet, but reduced to contemplate the embarking in the hot-pie trade.

“ We might give him a stool in our office, Lord Carrick, for it happens that we are a clerk short: and pay him—pay him—twenty shillings a week. As a temporary thing, of course.”

To one who had not had a dinner for days, twenty shillings a week seems an ample fortune; and Roland started up and grasped the elder lawyer’s hand.

“ I’ll earn it,” he said, his tone and eyes alike beaming with gratitude. “ I’ll work for you till I drop.”

Mr. Greatorex smiled. “ The work will not be difficult, Mr. Yorke; writing, and going on errands occasionally. If you do come,” he pointedly added, “ you must be ready to per-

form anything you may be directed to do, just as a regular clerk does."

"Ready and willing too," responded Roland.

"We have room for a certain number of clerks only," proceeded Mr. Greatorex, who was desirous that there should be no misunderstanding in the bargain; "each one has his appointed work and must get through it. Can you copy deeds?"

"*Can't I*," unceremoniously replied Roland. "I was nearly worked to death with old Galloway, of Helstonleigh."

"Were you ever with him?" cried Mr. Greatorex in surprise, to whom Mr. Galloway was known.

"Yes, for years; and part of the time had all the care of the office on my shoulders," was Roland's ready answer. "There was only Galloway then, beside myself, and *he* was not good for much. Why! the amount of copying I had to do was so great, I thought I should have dropped into my grave. Lord Carrick knows it."

Lord Carrick did, in so far as that he had heard Roland repeatedly assert it, and nodded assent. Mr. Greatorex thought the services of so experienced a clerk must be invaluable to any house, and felt charmed to have secured them.

And that is how it arose that Roland Yorke, as you have seen, was entering the office of Greatorex and Greatorex. He was to be a clerk there to all intents and purposes ; just as he had been in the old days at Mr. Galloway's ; and yet, when he came in that morning, after his summerset out of the hansom cab, with a five-pound note in his pocket that Lord Carrick had contrived to spare for him, and an order for unlimited credit at his lordship's tailor's, hatter's, and bootmaker's, Roland's buoyant heart and fate were alike radiant, as if he had suddenly come into a fortune.

CHAPTER IX.

UNEXPECTED MEETINGS.

“ You can go to your dinner, Mr. Yorke.”

The clocks were striking one, as Brown, the manager, gave the semi-order. Roland, to whom dinner was an agreeable interlude, especially under the circumstances of having money in his pocket to pay for it, leaped off his stool forthwith, and caught up his hat.

“ Are you not coming, Hurst ?”

Mr. Hurst shook his head. “ Little Jenner goes now. I stay until he comes back.”

Little Jenner had been making preparation to go of his own accord, brushing his hat, drawing down his waistcoat, pushing gingerly in order his mass of soft fair hair. He was remarkably small ; and these very small men are often very great dandies. Roland, who had shaken off the old pride in his rubs with the world, waited for him outside.

"Jenner, d'ye know of a good dining-place about here?" he asked, as they stood together, looking like a giant and a dwarf.

The clerk hesitated whether to say he did or did not. The place that he considered good might not appear so to the nephew of Sir Richard Yorke.

"I generally go to a house in Tottenham Court Road, sir. It's a kind of cook's shop, clean, and the meat excellent; but one sees all kinds of people there, and you may not think it up to you."

"Law, bless you!" cried Roland. "When a fellow has been knocked about for four years in the streets of Port Natal, he doesn't retain much ceremony. Let's get on to it. Do you know of any lodgings to be let in these parts, Jenner?" he continued again. "I shall get some as near to Greatorex's as I can. One does not want a three or four miles' dance night and morning."

Jenner said he did not know of any, but would help Mr. Yorke to look for some that evening if he liked. And they had turned into Tottenham Court Road, when Jenner halted to speak to some one he encountered: a little woman, very dark, who was bustling by with a black and white flat basket in her hand.

“How d’ye do, Mrs. Jones? How’s Mr. Ollivera?”

“Now, I’ve not got the time to stand bothering with you, Jenner,” was the tart retort. “Call in any evening you like, as I’ve told you before; but I’m up to my eyes in errands now.”

Roland Yorke, whose attention had been attracted to something in a shop-window, wheeled round on his heel at the voice, and stared at the speaker. Jenner had called her Mrs. Jones; but Roland fully believed no person in the world could own that voice, save one. A voice that struck on every chord of his memory, as connected with Helstonleigh.

“It *is* Mrs. Jenkins!” cried Roland, seizing the stranger’s hands. “What on earth does he mean by calling you Mrs. Jones?”

“Ah,” she groaned, “I am Mrs. Jones, more’s the shame and pity. Let it pass for now, young Mr. Yorke. I should have known you anywhere.”

“You don’t mean to say you are living in London?” returned Roland.

“Yes, I am. In Gower Street. Come and see me, Mr. Yorke; Jenner will show you the house. Did you make your fortune at Port Natal? You’d always used to be telling Jenkins, you know, that you should.”

“And I thought I *should*,” said Roland, with emphasis ; “but I got no luck, and it turned out a failure. *Won’t* I come and see you ! I say, Mrs. Jenkins, do you remember the toasted muffins that Jenkins wouldn’t eat ?”

Mrs. Jones nodded twice to the reminiscence. She went bustling on her way, and they on theirs. Roland for once was rather silent. Mingling with the satisfaction he experienced in meeting any one from Helstonleigh, especially one so associated with the old familiar daily life as Mrs. Jenkins had been, came the thoughts of the years since ; of the defeats and failures ; of the mortification that invariably lay on his heart when he had to tell of them and of what they had brought him. He had now met two of the old people in one day ; Hurst and Mrs. Jones ; or, as Roland still called her, Mrs. Jenkins. Cords would not have dragged Roland to Helstonleigh : his mother, with the rest of them at home, had come over to Ireland to stay part of the summer at Lord Carrick’s, soon after Roland’s return from Port Natal ; but he would not go to see them at the old home city. With the exception of scraps of news learnt from Hurst that day, Roland knew nothing about Helstonleigh’s later years.

"Look here, Jenner! What brings her name Jones? It used to be Jenkins."

"I think I have heard that it was Jenkins once," replied Jenner, reflectively. "She must have married Jones after Jenkins died. Did you know him?"

"Did I know him?" echoed Roland, to whom the question sounded a very superfluous one. "I should just think I did know him. Why, he was chief clerk for years to Galloway, that cantankerous old proctor I was with. Jenkins was a good fellow as ever lived, meek and patient, and of course Mrs. J. put upon him. She'd not allow him to have his will in the smallest way: he couldn't dress himself in a morning unless she chose to let him. Which she didn't always."

"Not let him dress himself?"

"It's true," affirmed Roland, diving down into the depth of the old grievances. "Our office was in an awful state of work at that time; and because Jenkins had a cough she'd lock up his pantaloons to keep him at home. It wasn't his fault; he'd have come in his coffin. Jones, whoever he may be, must have had the courage of a wolf to venture on her. Does he look like one?"

"I never saw him," said Jenner. "I think he's dead, too."

“Couldn’t stand it, I suppose ? My opinion is, it was her tongue took off poor Jenkins. He was mild as honey. Not that she’s a bad lot at bottom, mind you, Jenner. I wonder what brought her to London ?”

“I don’t know anything about her affairs,” said Jenner. “The Rev. Henry William Ollivera has his rooms in her house. And I go to see him now and then. That’s all.”

“Who is the Rev. William Ollivera ?”

“Curate of a parish hard by. His brother, a barrister, had chambers in Lincoln’s Inn, and I was his clerk. Four years ago he went the Oxford circuit, and came to his death at Helstonleigh. It was a shocking affair, and happened in the Joneses’ house. They lived at Helstonleigh then. Mrs. Jones’s sister went in one morning and found him dead in his chair.”

“My goodness !” cried Roland. “Was it a fit ?”

“Worse than that. He took away his own life. And I have never been able to understand it from that hour to this, for he was the most unlikely man living to do such a thing—as people all said. The Greatorexes interested themselves to get me a fresh place, giving me some temporary work in their office. It ended in my remaining with them.

They find me useful, and pay me well. It's four years now, sir, since it happened."

"Just one year before I got home from Natal," casually remarked Roland.

"He sends for me sometimes," continued Mr. Jenner, pursuing his own thoughts, which were running on the clergyman. "When any fresh idea occurs to him, he'll write off for me, post haste; and when I get there he puts all sorts of questions to me, about the old times in Lincoln's Inn. You see, he has always held that Mr. Ollivera did not kill himself, and has been ever since trying to get evidence to prove he did not. The hope never seems to grow old with him, or to rest; it is as fresh and near as it was the day he first took it up."

Roland felt a little puzzled. "Did Mr. Ollivera kill himself, or didn't he? Which do you mean?"

Jenner shook his head. "I think he did, unlikely though it seemed. All the circumstances proved it, and nobody doubted it except the Rev. Mr. Ollivera. Bede Greatorex, who was the last person to see him alive, thinks there can be no doubt whatever; I overheard him say it was just one of William Ollivera's crotchets, and not the first by a good many that he had taken up. The cler-

gyman used to be for ever coming into the office talking of it, saying should he do this or do the other, until Bede told him he couldn't have it ; that it interrupted business."

" What has Bede Greatorex to do with it ? Why should Ollivera come to him ?"

" Bede Greatorex has nearly as much to do with it as the clergyman. He and the two Olliveras were cousins. Bede Greatorex was awfully cut up at the death : he'd be glad to see that there was doubt attending it ; but he, as a sensible man, can't see it. They buried Mr. Ollivera like a dog."

" What did they do that for ?"

" The verdict was *felo-de-se*. Mr. Hurst can tell you all about it, sir ; he was at Hestonleigh at the time : he says he never saw such a scene in his life as the funeral. It was a moonlight night, and half the town was there."

" I'll get it all out of him," quoth Roland, who had not lost in the smallest degree his propensity to indulge in desultory gossip.

" Don't ask him in the office," advised Jenner. " Brown would stop you at the first word. He never let's a syllable be dropped upon the subject. I asked him one day what it was to him, and he answered that it was

not seemly to allude to the affair in the house, as Mr. Ollivera had been a connection of it. My fancy is that Brown must have known something of it at the time, and does not like it mentioned on his own score," confidentially added little Jenner, who was of a shrewd turn. "I saw him change colour once over it."

"Who is Brown?" questioned Roland.

"That's more than I can say," was the reply. "He's an uncommonly efficient clerk; but, once out of the office, he keeps himself to himself, and makes friends with none of us. Here we are, sir."

The eating-house, however unsuitable it might have been to one holding his own as the nephew of an English baronet, to say nothing of an Irish peer, was welcome as sun in harvest to hungry Roland. He ordered a magnificent dinner, off-hand: three plates of meat each, three of tart; vegetables, bread and beer *ad libitum*: paid for the whole, changing his five-pound note, and gave a shilling to the man who waited on them. Little Jenner went out with his face shining.

"We must make the best of our way back, Mr. Yorke. Time's up."

"Oh, is it, though," cried Roland. "I'm not going back yet. I shall take a turn round

to see Mrs. Jenkins ; there are five hundred things I want to ask her."

One can only be civil to a man who has just treated one to a good dinner, and Jenner did not like to tell Roland point-blank that he had better not go anywhere but to the office.

"They are awfully strict about time in our place," cried he ; "and we are busy just now. I must make haste back, sir."

"All right," said easy Roland. "Say I am coming."

His long legs went flying off in the direction of Gower Street, Jenner having given him the necessary instructions to find it ; and he burst clattering in upon Mrs. Jones in her sitting-room without the least ceremony, very much as he used to do in the old days when she was Mrs. Jenkins. Mrs. Jones had been for some time now given to wish that she had not changed her name. Doing very well as the widow Jenkins, years ago, in her little hosier's shop in High Street, Helstonleigh, what was her mortification to find one day that the large and handsome house next door, with its shop-windows of plate-glass, had been opened as another hosier's by a Mr. Richard Jones. Would customers continue to come to her plain and unpretending mart, when

that new one, grand, imposing, and telling of an unlimited stock within, was staring them in the face ? The widow Jenkins feared not ; and fretted herself to fiddle-strings.

The fear might have had no cause of foundation : the show kept up at the adjoining house was perhaps founded on artificial bases, rather than real. Richard Jones (whom the city had already begun to designate as Dicky) turned out to be of a sociable nature ; he made her acquaintance whether she would or no, and suddenly proposed to her to unite the two businesses in one, by making herself, and her stock, and her connection, over to him. Mrs. Jenkins's first impulse was to throw at his head the nearest parcel that came to hand. Familiarity with an idea, however, sometimes reconciles the worst adversary ; as at length it did Mrs. Jenkins to this. To give her her due, she took no account whatever of Mr. Jones in the matter ; he went for nothing, a bale of waste flung in to make weight, she should rule him just as she had ruled Jenkins ; her sole temptation was the flourishing shop, à côté, and the good, well-furnished house. So Mrs. Jenkins exchanged her name for that of Jones, and removed, bag and baggage ; resigning the inferior home that had so long sheltered her. It was close upon this, that one of

the barristers, coming in to the summer assizes at Helstoneleigh, took apartments at Mrs. Jones's. That was Mr. Ollivera: and in the following March, when he again came in, occurred his tragical ending.

Before this, long before it, Mrs. Jones had grown to realize to herself the truth of the homely proverb, All's not gold that glitters. Mr. Jones's connection did not prove to be of the most extensive kind; far from it; the large, imposing stock turned out to be three parts dummies; and she grew to believe—to see—that his motive in marrying her was to uphold his newly-established business by beguiling to it her old customers. The knowledge did not tend to soothe her naturally tart temper; neither did the fact that her husband took a vast deal of pleasure abroad, spent money recklessly, and left her to do all the work. Mr. Jones's debts came out, one after the other; more than could be paid; and one morning some men of the law walked quietly in, and put themselves in possession of the effects. Things had come to a crisis. Mr. Jones, after battling out affairs with the bankruptcy commissioner, started for America; his wife went off to London. Certain money, her own past savings, she had been wise enough to have secured to her separate special use,

and that could not be touched. With a portion of it she bought in some of the furniture, and set up as a letter of lodgings in Gower Street.

But that Roland Yorke had not seen the parlour at Helstonleigh (which the reader had the satisfaction of once entering with Mr. Butterby), he would have gone well nigh to think this the same room. The red carpet on the floor, the small book-shelves, the mahogany sideboard with its array of glasses, the horse-hair chairs, the red cloth on the centre table, all had been transplanted. When Roland bustled in, he found Mrs. Jones knitting away at lambs'-wool socks, as if for her life. In the intervals of her home occupation, or when her house was slack of lodgers, she did these for sale, and realized a very fair profit.

“Now then,” said Roland, stirring up the fire of his own accord, and making himself at home, as he liked to do wherever he might be, “I want to know all about everybody.”

Mrs. Jones turned her chair towards him with a jerk; and Roland put question after question about the old city, which he had so abruptly quitted more than seven years before. It may be that Mrs. Jones recognized in him a kind of fellow-sufferer. Neither of them

cared to see Helstonleigh again, unless under the auspices of a more propitious fate than the present. Any way, she was gracious to Roland, and gave him information as fast as he asked for it, repeating some things he had heard before. He persisted in calling her Mrs. Jenkins, saying it came more natural than the other name.

Mr. Channing was dead. His eldest son Hamish was living in London. Arthur was Mr. Galloway's right hand; Tom was a clergyman, and just made a minor canon of the old cathedral; Charley Mrs. Jones knew nothing about, except that he was in India. The college school had got a new master. Mr. Ketch was reposing in a damp green nook, side by side with old Jenkins the bedesman. Hamish Channing's bank had come to grief, Mrs. Jenkins did not know how. In the panic, she believed.

“And that beautiful kinsman of mine, William Yorke, reigns at Hazeldon, and old Galloway is flourishing in his office, with his flaxen curls!” burst forth Roland, suddenly struck with a weighty sense of injustice. “The bad people get the luck of it in this world, Mrs. Jenkins; the deserving ones go begging. Hamish Channing's bank come to grief;—bright

Hamish! And look at me!—and you! I never saw such a world as this, with its miserable ups and down."

"Ah," said Mrs. Jones with a touch of her native tartness, "it's a good thing there's another world to come after. We may find that a better one."

The prospect (probably from being regarded as rather far-off) did not appear to afford present satisfaction to Roland. He sat pulling at his whiskers, moodily resenting the general blindness of Fortune in regard to merit, and then suddenly wheeled round to his own affairs.

"I say, Mrs. J."—a compromise between the two names and serving for both—"I want a lodging. Couldn't you let me come here?"

She looked up briskly. "What kind of a lodging? I mean as to position and price."

"Oh, something comfortable," said Roland.

Perhaps for old acquaintance' sake, perhaps because she had some apartments vacant, Mrs. Jones appeared to regard the proposition with no disfavour; and began to talk of her house's accommodation.

"The rooms on the first floor are very good and well furnished," she said. "When I was about it, Mr. Yorke, I thought I might

as well have things nice as not, one finds the return ; and the drawing-room floor naturally gets served the best. There's a piano in the front room, and the bed in the back room is excellent."

"They'd be just the thing for me," cried Roland, rising to walk about in pleasurable excitement. "What's the rent?"

"They are let for a pound a week. Mr.—"

"That'll do ; I can pay it," said he eagerly. "I don't play the piano myself, but it may be useful if I give a party. You'll cook for me ?"

"Of course we'll cook," said Mrs. Jones. "But I was about to tell you that those rooms are let to a clergyman. If you——"

Roland had come to an abrupt anchor at the edge of the table, and the look of blank dismay on his face was such as to cut short Mrs. Jones's speech. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Mrs. J., I couldn't give it ; I was forgetting. They are to pay me a pound a-week at Greatorex's ; but I can't spend it all in lodgings, I'm afraid. There'll be other things wanted."

"Other things!" ejaculated Mrs. Jones. "I should think there would be other things. Food, and drink, and firing, and light, and

wear and tear of clothes, and washing ; and a hundred extras beside."

Roland sat in perplexity. Ways and means seem to have grown dark together.

"Couldn't you let me one room ? A room with a turn-up bedstead in it, Mrs. Jenkins, or something of that ? Couldn't you take the pound a-week, and do for me ?"

"I don't know but I might make some such arrangement, and let you have the front parlour," she slowly said. "We've got a Scripture reader in the back one."

Roland started up impulsively to look at the front parlour, intending to take it, off-hand. As they quitted the room—which was built out at the back, on the staircase that led down to the kitchen—Roland saw a tall, fair, good-looking young woman, who stopped and asked some question of Mrs. Jones. Which that lady answered sharply.

"I have no time to talk about trifles now, Alletha."

"Who's that ?" cried Roland, as they entered the parlour : a small room with a dark paper and faded red curtains.

"It's my sister, Mr. Yorke."

"I say, Mrs. J., this is a stunning room," exclaimed Roland, who was in that eager

mood, of his, when 'all things looked couleur-de-rose. "Can I come in to-day?"

"You can come to-morrow, if we agree. That sofa lets out into a bedstead at night. You must not get into my debt, though, Mr. Yorke," she added, in the plain, straightforward way that was habitual with her. "I couldn't afford it, and I tell you so beforehand."

"I'll never do that," said Roland, impulsively earnest in his sincerity. "I'll bring you home the pound each week, and then I shan't be tempted to change it. Look here"—taking two sovereigns from his pocket—"that's to steer on ahead with. Does she live here?" he added, going back without ceremony to the subject of Miss Rye. "Alletha, do you call her? What an odd name!"

"The name was a mistake of the parson's when she was christened. It was to have been Allethea. I've had her with me four or five years now. She is a dressmaker, Mr. Yorke, and works sometimes at home, and sometimes out."

"She'd be uncommonly good-looking if she were not such a shadow," commented Roland with candour.

Mrs. Jones gave her head a toss, as if the

topic displeased her. "Shadow, indeed! Yes, and she's likely to be one. Never was any pig more obstinate than she."

"Pigs!" cried Roland with energy, "you should see the obstinacy of Natal pigs, Mrs. J. *I* have. Drove 'em too."

"It couldn't equal hers," disputed Mrs. J., with intense acrimony. "She is wedded to the memory of a runaway villain, Mr. Yorke, that's what she is! A good opportunity presented itself to her lately of settling, but she'd not take it. She'd sooner fret out her life after *him*, than look upon an honest man. Tie two pigs together by the tail, and let 'em pull two ways till they drop, they'd not equal her. And for a runaway; a man that disgraced himself!"

"What did he do?" asked curious Roland.

"It's not very good to repeat," said Mrs. Jones tartly. "She lived in Birmingham, our native place, till the mother died, and then she came to me at Helstonleigh. First thing she tells me was, that she was engaged to be married to some young man in an office there, George Winter: and over she goes to Birmingham the next Christmas on a visit to her aunt, on purpose to meet him: stays there a week, and comes home again. Well, Mr. Yorke, this grand young man, this

George Winter, about whom I had *my* doubts, though I'd never seen him, got into trouble before three more months had gone by: he and a fellow-clerk did something wrong with the money, and Winter decamped."

"I wonder if he went to Port Natal?" mused Roland. "We had some queer people over there."

"It don't much matter where he went," returned Mrs. Jones, hotly. "He did go, and he never came back, and he took Alletha's common sense away with him: what with him and what with the dreadful affair at our house of that poor Mr. Ollivera, she has never been herself since. It both happened about the same time."

Roland recalled what he had recently heard from Jenner regarding the death of the barrister, and felt a little at sea. "What was Ollivera to her?" he asked.

"What! why, nothing," said Mrs. Jones. "And she's no better than a lunatic to have taken it as she did. Whether it's that, or whether it's the pining after the other precious runaway, *I* don't know, but one of the two's preying upon her. There's Mr. Ollivera!"

Roland went to the window. In the street, talking, stood a dark, small man in the garb

of a clergyman, with a grave but not unpleasant face, and sad dark eyes.

“Oh, that’s Mr. Ollivera, is it?” quoth Roland. “He looks another shadow.”

“And it is another case of obstinacy,” rejoined Mrs. Jones. “He has refused all along to believe that his brother killed himself; you could as soon make him think the sun never shone. He comes to my parlour and talks to me about it by the hour together, with his note-case in his hand, till Alletha can’t sit any longer, and goes rushing off with her work like any mad woman.”

“Why should she rush off? What harm does it do to her?”

“I don’t know: it’s one of the puzzles to be found out. His coming here was a curious thing, Mr. Yorke. One day I was standing at the front door, and saw a young clergyman passing. He looked at me, and stopped; and I knew him for Henry Ollivera, though we had only met at the time of the death. When I told him I had rooms to let, and very nice ones, for it struck me that perhaps he might be able to recommend them, he looked out in that thoughtful, dreamy way he has, (look at his eyes now, Mr. Yorke!) seeing nothing, I’m certain; and then said he’d go up and look at the rooms; and we went up. Would you be-

lieve that he took them for himself on the spot?"

"What a brick!" cried Roland, who was following out suggested ideas but imperfectly. "I'll take this one."

"Alletha gave a great cry when she heard he was coming, and said it was Fate. I demanded what she meant by that, but she'd not open her lips further. Talk of Natal pigs, forsooth, she's worse. He took possession of the rooms within the week; and I say, Mr. Yorke, that, Fate or not Fate, he never had but one object in coming—the sifting of that past calamity. His poor mistaken mind is ever on the rack to bring some discovery to light. It's like that search one reads of, after the philosopher's stone."

Roland laughed. He was not very profound himself, but the philosopher's stone and Mrs. Jones seemed utterly at variance.

"It does," she said. "For there's no stone to be found in the one case, and no discovery to be made in the other, beyond what has been made. I don't say this to the parson, Mr. Yorke; I listen to him and humour him for the sake of his dead brother."

"Well, I shan't bother you about dead people, Mrs. J., so you let me the room."

The bargain was not difficult. Every sug-

gestion made by Mrs. Jones, he acceded to before it had well left her lips. He had fallen into good hands. Whatever might be Mrs. Jones's faults of manner and temper, she was strictly just, regarding Roland's interests at least in an equal degree with her own.

"Do you know," said Roland, nursing his knee as the bargain concluded, "I have never felt so much at home since I left it, as I did just now by your fire, Mrs. J.? I'm uncommon glad I came here."

He was genuine in what he said: indeed Roland could but be genuine always, too much so sometimes. Mrs. J.—as he called her—brought back so vividly the old home life of his boyhood, now gone by for ever, that it was like being at Helstonleigh again.

"My eldest brother, George, is dead," said Roland. "Gerald is grand with his chambers and his club, and is married besides, but I've not seen him. Tod is in the army: do you remember him? an awful young scamp he was, his face all manner of colours from fighting, and his clothes torn to that degree that Lady Augusta used to threaten to send him to school without any. Where's your husband, number two, Mrs. J.?"

"It is to be hoped he is where he will never come away from; he went sailing off three

years ago from Liverpool," she answered sharply; for, of all sore subjects, this of her second marriage was the worst. "Any way, I have made myself and my goods secure from him."

"Perhaps *he's* at Port Natal, driving pigs. He'll find out what they are if he is."

Mr. Ollivera was turning to the house. Roland opened the parlour door when he had passed it; to look after him.

Some one else was there. Peering out from a dark nook in the passage, her lips slightly apart, her eyes strained after the clergyman with a strange kind of fear in their depths, stood Alletha Rye. Mr. Ollivera suddenly turned back, as though he had forgotten something, and she shrank out of sight. Mrs. Jones introduced Roland. "Mr. Roland Yorke."

Mr. Ollivera's face was thin; his dark brown eyes shone with a flashing, restless, feverish light. Be you very sure when that peculiar light is seen, it betokens a mind ill at rest. The eyes fixed themselves on Roland: and perhaps there was something in the tall, fine form, in the good-nature of the strong-featured countenance, that recalled a memory to Mr. Ollivera.

“Any relative of the Yorkes of Helstonleigh?”

“I should think so,” said Roland, “I am a Yorke of Helstonleigh. But I’ve not been there since I went to Port Natal, seven years and more ago. Do you know them, Mr. Ollivera?”

“I know a little of the minor-canon, William Yorke, and——”

“Oh! he!” curtly interrupted Roland, with a vast amount of scorn. “He is a beauty to know, he is.”

The remark, so like a flash of boyish resentment, excited a slight smile in Mr. Ollivera.

“Bill Yorke showed himself a cur once in his life, and it’s not me that’s going to forget it. He’d have cared for my telling him of it, too, had I come back worth a few millions from Port Natal, and gone about Helstonleigh in my carriage and four.”

Mr. Ollivera said some courteous words about hoping to make Roland’s better acquaintance, and departed. Roland suddenly remembered the claims of his office, and tore away at full speed.

Never slackening it until he reached the house of Greatorex and Greatorex; and there he very nearly knocked down a little girl

who had just come out of the private entrance. Roland turned to apologise; but the words died on his lips, and he stood like one suddenly struck dumb, staring in silence.

In the pretty young lady, one of two who were talking together in the passage, and looked round at the commotion, Roland thought he recognised an old friend, now the wife of his cousin William Yorke. He bounded in, and seized her hands.

“ You are Constance Channing ?”

“ No,” replied the young lady, with wondering eyes, “ I am Annabel.”

Mr. Roland Yorke’s first movement was to take the sweet face between his hands, and kiss it tenderly. Struggling, blushing, almost weeping, the young lady drew back against the wall.

“ How dare you ?” she demanded in bitter resentment. “ Are you out of your mind, sir ?”

“ Good gracious, Annabel, don’t you know me ? I am your old playfellow, Roland Yorke.”

“ Does that give you any right to insult me ? I might have known it was no one else,” she added in the moment’s anger.

“ Why, Annabel, it was only done in my great joy. I had used to kiss you, you re-

member : you were but a little mite then, and I was a great big tease. Oh, I am so glad to see you ! I'd rather have met you than all the world. You can't be angry with me. Shake hands and be friends."

To remain long at variance with Roland was one of the impossibilities of social life. He possessed himself of Annabel Channing's hand and nearly shook it off. What with his hearty words, and what (may it be confessed, even of Annabel) with the flattery of his praises and genuine admiration, Annabel's smiles broke forth amidst her blushes. Roland's eyes looked as if they would devour her.

" I say, I never saw anybody so pretty in all my life. It is the nicest face ; just like what Constance's used to be. I thought it was Constance, you know. Was she not daft, though, to go and take up again with that miserable William Yorke ?"

Standing by, having looked on with a smile of grand pity mingled with amusement, was a lady in most fashionable attire, the amount of hair on her head something marvellous to look at.

" I should have known Roland Yorke anywhere," she said, holding out her hand.

" Why, if I don't believe it's one of the Joliffes !"

“Hush, Roland,” said Annabel, hastening to stop his freedom, and the tone proved that she had nearly forgiven him on her own score. “This is Mrs. Bede Greatorex.”

“Formerly Louisa Joliffe,” put in that lady. “Now do you know me?”

“Well, I never met with such a strange thing,” cried Roland. “That makes three—four—of the old Helstoneleigh people I have met to-day. Hurst, Mrs. J., and now you two. I think there must be magic in it.”

“You must come and see me soon, Roland,” said Mrs. Greatorex as she went out. Miss Channing waited for the little girl, Jane Greatorex, who had run in her wilful manner into her uncle Bede’s office. Roland offered to fetch her.

“Thank you,” said Miss Channing. “Do you know which is the office?”

“Know! law bless you!” cried Roland. “What do you suppose I am, Annabel? Clerk to Greatorex and Greatorex.”

Her cheeks flushed with surprise. “Clerk to Greatorex and Greatorex! I thought you went to Port Natal to make your fortune.”

“But I did not make it. It has been nothing but knocking about; then and since. Carrick is a trump, as he always was, but he gets floored himself sometimes; and that’s his

case now. If they had not given me a stool here (which he got for me) I'm not sure but I should have gone into the hot-pie line."

"The—what?"

"The hot-pie line; crying them in the streets, you know, with a basket and a white cloth, and a paper cap on. There's a fine opening for it down in Poplar."

Miss Channing burst out laughing.

"It would be nothing to a fellow who has been over yonder," avowed Roland, jerking his head in the direction Port Natal might be supposed to lie. And then leaping to a widely different subject in his volatile lightness, he said something that brought the tears to her eyes, the drooping tremor to her lips.

"It was so good in the old days; all of us children together; we were no better. And Mr. Channing is gone, I hear! Oh, I am so sorry, Annabel!"

"Two years last February," she said in a hushed tone. "We have just put off our mourning for him. Mamma is in the dear old house, and Arthur and Tom live with her. Will you please look for the little girl, Mr. Yorke?"

"Now I vow!"—burst forth Roland in a heat. "I'll not stand that, you know. One would think you had put on stilts. If ever

you call me 'Mr. Yorke' again, I'll go back to Port Natal."

She laughed a little pleasant laugh of embarrassment. "But, please, I want my pupil. I cannot go myself into the offices to look for her."

At that moment Jane Greatorex came dancing up, and was secured. Roland stood at the door to watch them away, exchanged a few light words with a clerk then entering, and finally bustled into the office.

"Am I late?" began Roland, with characteristic indifference. "I'm very sorry, Mr. Brown. I was looking at some lodgings; and I met an old friend or two. It all served to hinder me, but I'll soon make up for it."

"You have been away two hours and a half, Mr. Yorke."

"It's more, I think," said Roland. "I assure you I did my best to get back. You'll soon find what I can get through, Mr. Brown."

Mr. Brown made no reply whatever. Jenner was absent, but Hurst was at his post, writing, and the faint hum of voices in the adjoining room, told that some client was holding conference with Mr. Bede Greatorex.

Roland resumed his copying where he had left off, and wrote for a quarter of an hour without speaking. Diligence unheard of!

At the end of that time he looked off for a little relaxation.

“Hurst, where do you think I am going to lodge?”

“How should I know?” responded Mr. Hurst. And Roland told him where in an under-tone.

“Jenner and I were going along Tottenham Court Road, and met her,” he resumed presently, after a short interlude of writing. “She looks twenty years older.”

“That’s through her tongue,” suggested Mr. Hurst.

“In the old days down there, I’d as soon have gone to live in a Tartar’s house as in hers. But weren’t her teas and toasted muffins good! Here, in this desert of a place—and it’s worse of a desert to me than Port Natal—to get into her house will seem like getting into home again.”

Mr. Brown, looking off his work to refer to a paper by his side, took the opportunity to direct a glance at the opposite desk. Whether Roland took it to himself or not, he applied sedulously for a couple of minutes to his writing.

“I say, Hurst, what a row there is about that dead Mr. Ollivera!”

“Where’s the row?”

“ Well, it seems to crop up everywhere. Jenner talked of it ; *she* talked of it ; I hear that other Mr. Ollivera talks of it. You were in the thick of it, they say.”

Hurst nodded. “ My father was the surgeon fetched to him when he was found dead, and had to give evidence at the inquest. I went to see him buried ; it *was* a scene. They stole a march on us, though.”

“ Who did ?”

“ They let us all disperse, and then went and read the burial service over the grave ; Ollivera the clergyman, and three or four more. Arthur Channing was one.”

“ Arthur Channing !”

Had any close observer been in the office, he might perchance have noticed that while Mr. Brown’s eyes still sought his work, his pen had ceased to play. His lips were slightly parted ; his ears were cocked ; the tale evidently bore for him as great an interest as it did for the speakers—an interest he did not choose should be seen. Had they been speaking aloud, he would have checked the conversation at once with an intimation that it could not concern anybody : as they spoke covertly, he listened at leisure. Mr. Hurst resumed.

“ Yes, Arthur Channing. The rumour ran that William Yorke had promised to be pre-

sent, but declined at the last moment, and Arthur Channing voluntarily took his place, out of sympathy for the feelings of the dead man's brother."

"Bravo, old Arthur! he's the trump he always was. That's the Reverend Bill all over."

"The Reverend Bill let them have his surplice. And there they stood, and read the burial service over the poor fellow by stealth, just as the old Scotch covenanters held their secret services in caves. Altogether a vast deal of romance encircled the affair, and some mystery. One Godfrey Pitman's name was mixed up in it."

"Who was Godfrey Pitman?"

Hurst dipped his pen slowly into the ink. "Nobody ever knew. He was lodging in the house, and went away mysteriously the same evening. Helstonleigh got to say in joke that there must have been two Godfrey Pitmans. The people of the house swore through thick and thin that the real Godfrey Pitman left at half-past four o'clock and went away by rail at five; others saw him quit the house at dark, and depart by the eight o'clock train. It got to a regular dispute."

"But had Godfrey Pitman anything to do with Mr. Ollivera?"

"Not he."

“Then where was the good of bringing him up?” cried Roland.

“I am only telling you of the different interests that were brought to bear upon it. It *was* an affair, that death was!”

The entrance of Mr. Frank Greatorex broke up the colloquy, recalling the clerks to their legitimate work. But the attention of one of them had become so absorbed that it was with difficulty he could get himself back again to passing life.

And that one was Mr. Brown.

CHAPTER X.

GOING INTO SOCIETY.

THE year was growing a little later ; the evenings were lengthening, and the light of the setting sun, illumining the west with a golden radiance, threw some of its cheering brightness even on the streets and houses of close, smoky London.

It shone on the person of the Reverend Henry William Ollivera, as he sat at home, taking his frugal meal, a tea-dinner. The room was a good one, and well furnished in a plain way. The table had been drawn towards one of the windows, open to the hum of the street ; the rose-wood cabinet at the back was handsome with its sheet of plate-glass and its white marble top ; the chairs and sofa were covered with substantial cloth, the pier-glass over the mantlepiece reflected back bright ornaments. Mr. Ollivera was of very simple habits, partly because he really cared little how he lived, partly because the scenes

of distress and privation he met with daily in his ministrations read him a lesson that he was not slow to take. How could he pamper himself up with rich food, when so many within a stone's throw were pining for want of bread ? His landlady, Mrs. Jones, gave him sound lectures on occasion, telling him to his face that he was trying to break down. Sometimes she prepared nice dinners in spite of him : a fowl, or some other luxury, and Mr. Ollivera smiled and did not say it was not enjoyed. The district of his curacy was full of poor ; poverty, vice, misery reigned, and *would* reign, in spite of what he could do. Some of the worst phases of London life were ever before him. The great problem, "What shall be done with these ?" arose to his mind day by day. He had his scripture readers ; he had other help ; but destitution both of body and mind reared itself aloft like a many-headed monster, defying all solution. Sometimes Mr. Ollivera did not come in to dinner at all, but took a mutton-chop with his tea ; as he was doing now.

Four years had elapsed since his brother's mysterious death (surely it may be called so !) and the conviction on the clergyman's mind, that the verdict was wholly at variance with the facts, had not abated one iota. Nay, time

had but served to strengthen it. Nothing else had strengthened it. No discovery had been made, no circumstance, however minute, had arisen to throw light upon it one way or the other. The hoped-for, looked-for communication from the police-agent, Butterby, had never come. In point of fact, Mr. Butterby, in regard to this case, had found himself wholly at sea. Godfrey Pitman did not turn up in response to the threatened "looking after;" Miss Rye departed for London with her sister when affairs at the Jones's came to a crash; and, if truth must be told, Mr. Butterby veered round to his original opinion, that the verdict had been a correct one. Once, and once only, that renowned officer had presented himself at the house of Greatorex and Greatorex. Happening to be in London, he thought he would give them a call. But he brought no news. It was but a few weeks following the occurrence, and there might not have been time for any to arise. One thing he had requested—to retain in his possession the scrap of writing found on the table at the death. It might be useful to him, he said, for of course he should still keep his eyes open: and Mr. Greatorex readily acquiesced. Since then nothing whatever had been heard from Mr. Butterby, or from any

other quarter ; but the sad facts were rarely out of the clergyman's mind ; and the positive conviction, the *expectation* of the light, to break in sooner or later, burnt within him with a steady ray, sure and true as Heaven.

Not of this, however, was Mr. Ollivera's mind filled this evening. His thoughts were running on the disheartening scenes of the day ; the difficult men and women he had tried to deal with—some of them meek and resigned, many hard and bad ; all wanting help for their sick bodies or worse souls. There was one case in particular that interested him sadly. A man named Gisby, discovered shortly before, lay in a room, dying slowly. He did not want help in kind, as so many did ; but of spiritual help, none could be in greater need. Little by little, Mr. Ollivera got at his history. It appeared that the man had once been servant in the house of Kene, the Queen's counsel—Judge Kene now : he had been raised to the bench in the past year. During his service there, a silver mug disappeared ; circumstances seemed to point to Gisby as guilty, and he was discharged, getting subsequently other employment.

But now, the man was not guilty—as he convinced Mr. Ollivera, and the suspicion appeared to have worked him a great deal of ill,

and made him hard. On this day, when the clergyman sat by his bed-side, reading and praying, he had turned a deaf ear. "Where's the use?" he roughly cried, "Sir Thomas thinks me guilty always." It struck Mr. Ollivera that the man had greatly respected his master, had valued his good opinion, and craved for it still; and the next morning this was confirmed. "You'll go to him when I'm dead, sir, and tell him the truth then, that I was not guilty? I never touched the mug, or knew how or where it went."

Returning home with these words ringing in his ears, Mr. Ollivera could not get the man out of his mind. So long as the *sense of being wronged* lay upon Gisby, so long would he encase himself in his hard indifference, and refuse to hear. "I must get Kene to go to see the man," decided Mr. Ollivera. "He must hear with his own ears, and see with his own eyes that he was not guilty, and tell him so; and then Gisby will come round. I wonder if Kene is back from circuit."

Excessively tired with his day's work, for his frame was not of the strongest, Mr. Ollivera did not care to go out that evening to Sir Thomas Kene's distant residence on the chance of not finding him. And yet, if the judge was back, there ought to be no time

lost in communicating with him, for Gisby was daily getting nearer to death. "Bede Greatorex will be able to tell me," suddenly thought Mr. Ollivera, when his tea had been long over and twilight was setting in. "I'll send and ask him."

Moving to his writing-table, he wrote a short note, reading it over before enclosing it in an envelope.

"DEAR BEDE,

"Can you tell me whether Sir Thomas Kene is in London? I wish particularly to see him as soon as possible. It is on a little matter connected with my parish work.

"Truly yours,

"WILLIAM OLLIVERA."

It was a latent thought that induced Mr. Ollivera to add the concluding sentence; and the motive shall be told. He and Bede Greatorex had come to an issue twice upon the subject of his so persistently cherishing the notion that the now long-past death was anything but a suicide; or rather, that he should *pursue* it. Bede heard so much of it from him that he grew vexed, and at length vowed he would listen to him no more. And Mr. Ollivera thought that if Bede fancied he wanted

to see Sir Thomas Kene on that subject, he might refuse to answer him.

Ringing the bell, he gave the note to the servant, with a request (preferred with depreciation and a plea of his own tired state, for he was one of those who are sensitively chary of giving any extra trouble) that it should be taken to Mr. Bede Greatorex, and an answer waited for.

But when the girl got down stairs, there arose some slight difficulty ; she was engaged in a necessary household occupation—ironing—and her mistress did not care that she should quit it. Miss Rye stood by with her things on, about to go out on some errand of her own. Ah me ! these apparently trifling chances do not happen accidentally.

“ Can’t *you* just step round to Bedford Square, with it, Alletha ? ” asked Mrs. Jones. “ It won’t take you far out of your way.”

Miss Rye’s silent answer—she seemed always silent now—was to pick up the note and go out with it. She knew the house, for she worked occasionally for Mrs. Bede Greatorex, and was passing to the private entrance when she encountered Frank Greatorex, who was coming out at the other door. He wished her good evening, and she told him her errand, showing the note directed to Bede.

"He is in his office still," said Frank, throwing open the door for her. "Walk in. Mr. Brown, attend here, please."

Miss Rye stepped into the semi-lighted room, for there was only a shaded lamp on Mr. Brown's desk ; and Frank Greatorex, closing the door, was gone again. Mr. Brown, at work as late as his master, came forward.

"For Mr. Bede Greatorex," said Miss Rye, handing him the note. "I will wait——"

The words were broken off with a faint, sharp cry. A cry, low though it was, of surprise, of terror, of dismay. Both their faces blanched to whiteness, they stood gazing at each other, she with strained eyes and drawn-back lips, he with a kind of forced stillness on his features, that nevertheless told of inward emotion.

"Oh, my good heaven !" she breathed in her agitation. "Is it *you*?"

Miss Rye had heard speak of Mr. Brown, the managing clerk in the department of Mr. Bede Greatorex. Jenner had mentioned him : Roland Yorke had commented on him and his wig. But that "Mr. Brown" should be the man now standing before her, she had never suspected ; no, not in her wildest dreams.

"Sit down, Miss Rye. You are faint."

She put his arm from her, as he would have

supported her to a seat, and staggered to one of herself. He followed, and stood by her in silence.

“What are you called *here*?” she began—and, it may be, that in the moment’s agitation she forgot his ostensible name and really put it as a question, not in mocking, condemnatory scorn:—“Godfrey Pitman?”

Every instinct of terror the man possessed seemed to rise up within him at sound of the name. He glanced round the room; at the desks; at the walls; as if to assure himself that no ear was there.

“Hush—sh—sh!” with a prolonged note of caution. “Never breathe that name, here or elsewhere.”

“What if I were to? To speak it aloud to all who ought to hear it?”

“Why then you would bring a hornet’s nest about heads that you little wot of. Their sting might end in worse than death.”

“Death for you?”

“No: I should be the hangman.”

“What do you mean?”

“Listen, Miss Rye. I cannot tell you what I mean: and your better plan will be never to ask me. If——”

“Better for whom?” she interrupted.

“For—well, for me, for one. The fact is,

that certain interests pertaining to myself and others—*certain reminiscences of the past*,” he continued with very strong emphasis, “have become so complicated, so interwoven as it were one with the other, that we must in all probability stand or fall together.”

“I do not understand you.”

“I can scarcely expect that you should. But—were any proceeding on your part, any word, whether spoken by design or accident, to lead to that fall, you would rue it to the last hour of your life. *That* you can at least understand.”

The faintness was passing off, and Miss Rye rose, steadyng herself against the railings of Mr. Hurst’s desk. At that moment the inner door was unlatched, and the clerk, recalled to present duties, caught the note from her unresisting hand.

“For Mr. Bede Greatorex,” he said aloud, glancing at the superscription. “I will give it to him.”

It was Mr. Bede Greatorex who came forth. He took the note, and glanced at Alletha.

“Ah, Miss Rye! Is it you?”

“Our maid was busy, so I brought it down,” she explained. “Mr. Ollivera is waiting for an answer.”

Bede Greatorex went back to his room,

leaving the intervening door open. She sat and waited. Mr. Brown, whose work was in a hurry, wrote on steadily at his desk by the light of a shaded lamp. A minute or two, and Bede Greatorex brought her a bit of paper twisted up, and showed her out himself.

With the errand she had come abroad to execute for herself gone clean out of her head, Alletha Rye went back home, her brain in a whirl. The streets she passed through were crowded with all the bustle and jostle of London life ; but, had she been traversing an African desert, she could not have felt more entirely alone. Her life that night lay within her : and it was one of confused tumult.

The note found Mr. Ollivera asleep : as the twilight deepened, he had dropped, in sheer weariness, into an unconscious slumber. Untwisting the scrap of paper, he held it near a lighted candle and read the contents :—

“ DEAR HENRY,

“ Kene is back, and is coming to us this evening ; we expect two or three friends. Louisa will be pleased if you can join us. Faithfully yours,

“ B. G.”

The Rev. Mr. Ollivera eschewed gaiety of

all kinds, parties included. Over and over again had he been fruitlessly invited to the grand dinners and soirées of Mrs. Bede Greatorex, until they left off asking him. "Two or three friends," he repeated as he put down the note. "I don't mind that, for I must see Kene."

Dressing himself, he was on the point of setting out, when a messenger arrived to fetch him to a sick person ; so that it was half-past ten when he reached the house of Mr. Greatorex. And then, but for his mission to the Judge, he would have quitted it again without entering the reception-rooms.

Two or three friends ! Lining the wide staircase, dotting the handsome landing, crowding the numerous guest-rooms, there they were ; a mob of them. Women in the costly and fantastic toilettes of the present day ; men bowing and bending with their evening manners on. Mr. Ollivera resented the crowd as a personal wrong.

"'Two or three friends,' you wrote me word, Bede," he reproachfully said, seeing his cousin in a corner near the entrance-door. "You know I do not like these things and never go to them."

"On my word, Henry, I did not know it was going to be this cram," returned Bede

Greatorex. "I thought we might be twenty, perhaps, all told."

"How can you put up with this? Is it *seemly*, Bede—in this once staid and pattern house?"

"Seemly?" repeated Bede Greatorex.

"Forgive me, Bede. I was thinking of the dear old times under your mother's rule. The happy evenings, all hospitality and cheerfulness; the chapter read at bed-time, when the small knot of guests had departed. *Friends* were entertained then; but I don't know what you call these."

Perhaps Bede Greatorex had never, amid all his provocations, felt so tempted to avow the truth as now—that he abhorred it with his whole heart and soul. Henry William Ollivera could not hate and despise it more than he. As to the good old days of sunshine and peace thus recalled, a groan well nigh burst from him at their recollection. It was indeed a contrast, then and now: in more things than this. The world bore a new aspect for Bede Greatorex, and not a happier one.

"Is Kene here, Bede?"

"Not yet. What is it that you want with him?"

Mr. Ollivera gave a brief outline of the

case ; Bede left him in the middle of it to welcome fresh arrivals. Something awfully fine loomed up, in pink silk and lace, and blazing emeralds. It was Mrs. Bede Greatorex. Her chignon was a mile high, and her gown was below her shoulder-blades. The modest young clergyman turned away at the sight, his cheeks flushing a dusky red. Not in this kind of society of late years, the curiosities of fashionable attire were new to him.

“ Is Bede mad ?” he inwardly said, “ or has he lost all control over his wife’s actions ?”

Somebody else, not used to society, was staring on with all the eyes of wonder he possessed. And that was Roland Yorke. Leaning against the wall in a new suit of dress-clothes, with a huge pair of white gloves on that would have been quite the proper thing at Port Natal, stood Roland. Mr. Ollivera, trying to get away from everybody, ran against him. The two were great friends now, and Roland was in the habit of running up to Mr. Ollivera’s drawing-room at will.”

“ I say,” began Roland, “ this is rather strong, is it not ?”

“ Do you mean the crowd ?”

“ I mean everything. Some of the girls and women look as if they had forgotten to

put their gowns on. Why do they dress in this way?"

"Because they fancy it's the fashion, I suppose," replied Mr. Ollivera, drawing down the corners of his thin lips.

"They must have taken the fashion from the Zulu Kaffirs," returned Roland. "When one has been knocked about amidst that savage lot—fought with 'em, too, men and women—one loses superfluous fastidiousness, Mr. Ollivera; but I *don't* think this is right."

Mr. Ollivera intimated that there could not be a doubt it was all wrong.

"Down in Helstonleigh, where I come from, they dress themselves decently," observed Roland, forgetting that his reminiscences of the place dated more than seven years back, and that fashion penetrates to all the strongholds of society, whether near or distant. "The girls there are lovely, too. Just look if they are not."

Mr. Ollivera, in some slight surprise, followed the direction of the speaker's eyes, and saw a young lady sitting back in a corner; her white evening dress, her banded hair, the soft, pure flush on her delicate face, all as simple, and genuine, and modest as herself.

"That's what the girls are in my native place, Mr. Ollivera."

“Mrs. Bede Greatorex is a native of Hestonleigh, also,” observed the clergyman, dryly. And for a moment Roland was dumb. The pink robe, the tower of monstrous hair, and the shoulder-blades were in full view just then.

“No, she is not,” cried he, triumphantly. “The Joliffe girls were born in barracks ; they only came among us when the old colonel settled down.”

“Who is the young lady ?”

“Miss Channing. Her brother and I are old chums. He is the grandest fellow living ; the most noble gentleman the world can show. He—why, if I don’t believe you know him !” broke off Roland, as a recollection of something he had been told flashed across his mind.

“I !” returned Mr. Ollivera.

“Was Arthur Channing not at a—a certain night funeral ?” asked Roland, dropping his voice out of delicacy. “You know. When that precious cousin of mine, Bill Yorke, lent you his surplice.”

“Yes, yes,” said Mr. Ollivera, hastily ; “I had forgotten the name. And so that is Arthur Channing’s sister !”

“She is governess to that provoking little wretch, Jane Greatorex,” said polite Roland, forgetting in his turn that he was speaking of his listener’s cousin, “and she ought to be a

queen. She ought, Mr. Ollivera, and you would say so if you knew her. She looks one, does she not? She's as like Arthur as two pins, and he's fit for the noblest king in the world."

The clergyman slightly smiled. He had become accustomed to his new friend's impulsive mode of speech.

"Yes, we are both of us down just now, dependents of the Greatorex house—she teacher in it, I office-clerk," went on Roland. "Never mind: luck may turn some day. I told Annabel so just now, but she sent me away. I was talking to her too much, she said, and made people stare. Perhaps it was so: I know her cheeks turned red every other minute."

"And to make them paler, you take up your position here and gaze at her," observed Mr. Ollivera with another smile—and smiles were rare from him.

"Oh, law!" cried Roland. "I'm always doing something wrong. The fact is, there's nobody else worth looking at. See there! a yellow gown and no petticoats under it. If this is fashion, I hope my mother and sisters are not going in for it! I shall go back to her," he added, after a moment's pause. "It's a shame she should sit there alone, with

nothing to look at but those Models, passing and repassing right before her eyes. If Arthur were here, I believe he'd take her away. I do."

Roland, vegetating in that unfashionable region, Port Natal, had not yet become accustomed to the exigencies of modern days ; and he spoke freely. Just then the throng was great in front of him, and he remained where he was. Taller than almost any one in the room, he could look at Annabel 'at will ; Mr. Ollivera, about up to Roland's shoulder, could get but occasional glimpses of her. Many a one glanced at Roland with interest, wondering who the fine, strong young man was, leaning against the wall there, with the big white gloves on, and the good-natured face, unsophisticated as a boy's.

Elbowing his way presently across the room, something after the manner he might have elbowed through a crowd on the quay at Durban, Roland once more took up his position by Miss Channing. The old playfellows had become new friends, and Roland contrived that they should often meet. When Miss Channing was walking in the Square with her pupil, he was safe to run up, and stay talking ; quite oblivious to the exigencies of the office waiting for his services. Jane Greatorex had

learned to look for him, and would walk where she was likely to see him, in defiance of Miss Channing. In spite of Roland's early fever to quit his native place, in spite of his prolonged rovings, he was essentially a home-bird, and could have been content to talk of the old days and the old people with Annabel for ever.

“Where's Jane to-night?” he began, as he joined her.

“In bed. She was very naughty this evening, and for once Mr. Bede Greatorex interfered and sent her.”

“Poor child! She is awfully troublesome, though, and one gets tired of that in the long run. If you—Halloo!”

Roland stopped. He was gazing in surprise at some one standing near: a man nearly his own age, tall and strong, and bearing altogether a general resemblance to himself. But the other's face had a cynical cast, expressive of ill-nature, and the lips were disagreeably full. Roland recognized him for his brother, although they had not met for more than seven years.

“That's Gerald, if ever I saw him in my life.”

“Yes, it is Gerald,” said Miss Channing,

quietly. "He generally comes to Mrs. Bede's soirées."

"Isn't he got up!"

Roland's expression was an apt one. Gerald Yorke was in the very pink of male fashion. His manners were easy; entirely those of a man at home in society.

"He does it grand, does he not?" cried Roland, who had made one advance towards making friends with his brother since coming to London, and was not responded to in kind.

Miss Channing laughed. Gerald Yorke had entered on some kind of public career and was very prosperous, she believed, moving amidst the great ones of the land. Roland, quite forgetting where he was, or perhaps not caring, set up a whistle by way of attracting the attention of Gerald, who turned amidst others at the strange sound.

"How d'ye do, Gerald, old boy? Come and shake hands."

The voice was loud, glad, hearty; the great hand, with its great white glove drawn up over it, minus a button, was stretched above intervening heads. Gerald Yorke's face grew dark with the light of annoyance, and he hesitated before making the best of the situation, and getting near enough to shake the offered hand.

He would far rather have become conveniently deaf, and walked off in an opposite direction. Alike though the two brothers were in general personal resemblance, no contrast could be greater than they presented in other respects. Gerald, fine and fashionable, with his aristocratic air and his slow, affected drawl, was the very type of all that is false, of that insincerity and heartlessness obtaining in what is called society. Roland, hot, thoughtless, never weighing a word before he spoke it, impulsive, genuine, utterly unsophisticated as to the usages and manners that go to make up the meetings of fashionable life, was just as single-hearted and true.

Gerald, as Roland put it, "went in" for grandeur, and he was already prejudiced against his brother. In a communication from Lord Carrick, apologizing for not being able to answer satisfactorily Gerald's appeal for a loan, that nobleman had confidentially avowed that he could not at present assist even Roland effectually, and had got him a place as clerk temporarily, to save him from embarking in the hot-pie line. It may therefore be readily understood that Gerald did not consider an intimacy with Roland likely to conduce to his own advancement (to say nothing of respectability) and his annoyance

and surprise at seeing him now where he did were about equally great.

The hands were shaken, and a few words of greeting passed ; warm and open on Roland's part, cool and cautious on Gerald's. A friend of Gerald's, the Honourable Mr. Somebody, who was by his side and begged for an introduction, was more cordial than he.

"I have not seen him since we parted seven years ago, when I went off to Port Natal," explained Roland with his accustomed candour. "Haven't I had ups and downs since then, Gerald!" he continued, turning his beaming face upon his brother. "You have heard of them I dare say, through Carrick."

"You did not make a fortune," drawled Gerald, wishing he could get away.

"A fortune! Law bless you, Ger! I was glad to work on the port with the Kaffirs, unloading boats ; and to serve in stores, and to drive cattle and pigs ; anything for bread. You can't think how strange all this seems to me"—pointing to the waving crowd in the room, several of whom had gathered round, attracted by this fraternal meeting.

"Aw! Surprised to see you amidst them," minced Gerald, who could not resist the little ill-natured hint, in his growing rage.

"Mrs. Greatorex invited me," said Roland,

his honest simplicity detecting not the under-current of sarcasm. "I am in Greatorex's office ; I don't suppose you knew it, Gerald. They give me twenty shillings a week ; and Carrick goes bail for my rigging out. I got this coat from his tailor's to-night."

The crowd laughed, the Honourable roared, and Gerald Yorke was half mad.

"I'd not *acknowledge* it, at any rate, if I were you," he said, imprudently, his affection lost in a gust of temper. "After all, you were born a Yorke."

"Acknowledge what, Ger?" returned Roland.

"The—the—the shame of taking a common clerkship at twenty shillings a week ; and all the rest of the degradation," burst forth Gerald, setting conventionality at defiance. "My uncle, Lord Carrick, warned me of this ; my mother, Lady Augusta, spoke of it in a recent letter to me," he added for the benefit of the ears around.

"Why, Ger, where's the use of being put out?" retorted Roland, but with no symptom of ill-humour in his good-natured tone. "I was down, and had nobody to help me. Carrick couldn't ; old Dick Yorke wouldn't ; Lady Augusta said she had all of you pulling at her : and so Carrick talked to Greatorex

and Greatorex, and they put me into the place. The pound a week keeps me ; in clover too ; you should hear what I sometimes was reduced to live on at Port Natal. There was an opening for a hot-pie man down at Poplar, and the place was offered me ; if I had gone into that line you might have grumbled."

The ladies and gentlemen shrieked with merriment : they began to think the fine young fellow, who looked every whit as independent a man as his fastidious brother, was chaffing them all. Gerald ground his teeth, and tried to get away.

" You'll come and see me, old fellow ?" said Roland. " I've a stunning room, bed-room and sitting-room in one, the bedstead's let out at night. It is at Mother Jones's ; poor soft Jenkins's widow, you know, that we used to wot of in the days gone by."

Gerald made good his escape : and when they were quiet again, Roland had leisure to look at Miss Channing. Her bent face shone like a peony, the effect of vexation and suppressed laughter.

" Why, what's the matter ?" he asked.

" You should not say such things, Roland. It was quite out of place in a room like this."

" What things ?"

"About yourself. It is so different, you know, from anything young men experience here."

"But it is all true," returned Roland, unable to see the argument.

"Still it need not be proclaimed to an indiscriminate crowd. You might show more tact. Gerald was fit to die of mortification. And you who used to have so much pride!"

Roland Yorke, honestly willing to please everybody and vex none, stood looking ruefully. "As to pride, Annabel, if a fellow wants that knocked out of him, he had better go over to Port Natal, and get buffeted as I did," he concluded. "I left it all behind me there, I'm afraid. And, of tact, I don't think I ever possessed any."

Which was perfectly true.

Meanwhile Mr. Ollivera, waiting in vain to see Sir Thomas Kene enter, grew sick of the ever-changing, ever-moving panorama that jostled him, and went down stairs to his uncle's small and comfortable room, leaving word with the servants where he might be found if the Judge came in. Mr. Greatorex very rarely joined these large parties. He was sitting in quiet now, a bit of bright fire in the grate, for the evenings were still chilly, and a reading-lamp, newspapers, and books on

the table. Slender, active, upright still, he scarcely looked his age, sixty-two : his face was fresh yet, and not a thread of grey mingled with the smooth brown hair.

“Henry, is it you!” he exclaimed ; for he was surprised to see his nephew enter at that late hour. And Mr. Ollivera, as he took a chair, apologized for interrupting him, but said he had grown so weary of the turmoil above.

“You don’t mean to say *you* have been making one of them!”

“I have for once, uncle. It will serve me for ten years to come. People say to me sometimes, ‘Why don’t you go into society?’ Good heavens ! to think that rational beings, God’s people who have souls to be saved, can waste their precious hours in such, evening after evening ! The women for the most part are unseemly to behold ; their bodies half dressed, their faces powdered and painted, their heads monstrosities, their attire sinfully lavish. The men affect to be heartless, drawing coxcombs. It is a bad phase of life, this that we have drifted into, rotten at its core ; men and women alike artificial. Do *you* like this in your house, Uncle Greatorex ?”

“When Bede married, I resigned to him the mastership of the house, so far as

these things were concerned," replied Mr. Greatorex.

"I know. Does Bede like it?"

"He countenances it. For myself, I trouble them but little now. Even my dinner I often cause to be served here. Bede's wife was civil enough to come down this evening and press me to join them."

"Bede looks more worried than usual—and that need not be," observed William Ollivera. "What is it, I wonder? To me he has the air of a man silently fretting himself into his grave."

"You know what it is, William," said Mr. Greatorex, in a low tone, and calling his nephew, as he often did, by his second Christian name. "Bede's wife is his great worry. But there's another."

"What is it?"

"Illness," breathed Mr. Greatorex. "Symptoms that we don't like have shown themselves in him lately. However—they may pass away. The doctors think they will."

"I came here to meet Kene, whom I very particularly wish to see," resumed the clergyman, after a pause. "Bede said he expected him."

"Ay; some magnet must have drawn you, apart from *that*," pointing his thumb at the

rooms above. And Mr. Ollivera explained why he was seeking the Judge.

“I thought something fresh might have arisen in the old case; or at least that you fancied it,” observed Mr. Greatorex. “You must be coming round to our way of thinking, William. Time goes on, but *that* stands still.”

“I shall never come round to it.”

“John has been dead four years and two months, now,” pursued Mr. Greatorex. “And it has stood still all that time.”

William Ollivera leaned forward in his chair, and the fire and the lamp alike played on his wasted face, on the bright flush of emotion that rose in his thin cheeks.

“Uncle! Uncle Greatorex! it is as fresh in my mind now as it was the first day I went down to Helstonleigh, and saw him lying white and cold and dead, with the ban of the coroner’s verdict upon him. I cannot shake it off: and of late I am not sure but I have tried to do so, in the sheer weariness of prolonged disappointment. ‘Tarry yet awhile, and wait,’ a voice seems saying ever to me: and I am content to wait. I cannot rest; I find no peace. When I wake in the morning, I say, ‘This day may bring forth fruit;’ when I go to rest at night, the thought, that it has not, is

the last upon me. There will be neither rest nor peace for me until I have solved the enigma of my brother's death; and I am always working on for it."

"Sir Thomas Kene has come, sir," interrupted a servant at this juncture, opening the door.

Henry Ollivera rose; and, wishing Mr. Greatorex good night, went forth to his interview with the Judge.

CHAPTER XI.

DAY-DREAMS.

THE house was almost within a stone's-throw of Bedford Square ; one of a good street. Its drawing-room windows were thrown open to the fine evening twilight, and a lady sat at one of them in a musing attitude. She was very nice looking, with a clear healthy colour on her cheeks, and soft bright dark eyes that had a thought in them beyond her years, which may have been six or seven-and-twenty. The features were well-formed ; the shapely mouth, its rather thin and decisive lips, and the pretty pointed chin, spoke of innate firmness. Her hand, displaying its wedding-ring and keeper, was raised to support lightly her head, the slender fingers touching the smooth dark brown hair. She was perfectly still ; not a movement betrayed that she heard or saw aught but her own thoughts ; not a rustle stirred the folds of her soft silk dress, lying around her.

"Shall I tell him, or not?" she murmured at length. "I have never had any concealment from him yet, nor he from me: but then I know it will pain and worry him. He has certainly changed a little: in the old days it seemed that anxiety could never touch him; that he would always throw it from him with a light word. Heigho! I suppose it comes with the cares of life."

A moment's pause, during which she was again still as before, and then the soliloquy was resumed.

"I *could* keep it from him, if needs were: the postman gave me the letter as I was going out, and no one knows of its arrival. But still—I don't like to begin it; and he might feel vexed afterwards: for of course he must come to know of it sometime. Oh dear! I never felt so irresolute before. They used to say at home I was so very downright. I wonder which would be *right* to do? If I were sure he——"

The room door was pushed open with a sudden whirl, and a little child came flying in with outstretched arms and a shouting, joyous laugh.

"Mamma, mamma!"

"Nelly!"

The arms were entwined together, the
VOL. I.

golden head with its shower of silken curls, nestled on the mother's bosom. Oh, but she was of rare loveliness, this child; with the delicately fair features, the great blue eyes, the sunny hair, and ever-sunny temperament.

“Now, Nelly! You know you have been told over and over again not to be so boisterous. Fancy a little lady, just five years old, coming in like that! It might have been a great rude dog.”

Another sweet, joyous laugh in answer, a host of kisses pressed by way of peace-offering on the gentle face, bent down in reproof more mock than real.

“Nurse was running to catch me. She says it's bedtime.” And, to confirm the assertion, the French clock on the mantle-piece at that moment told out eight.

“So it is. Come and say good-night to papa, Nelly.”

Taking the child's hand she went out into what seemed a flood of light, after the gradually darkening room. The hall-lamp threw its rays upwards; on the gleaming silk of her pale blue dress, on the white fairy robes of the child, on the well-carpeted stairs. In the front room below, the tea stood ready by the evening fire: they went through to another room; and the mother spoke.

“ Nelly has come to wish papa good-night.”

Seated at the table of this inner room was a gentleman writing fast by a shaded candle. He looked up with a sunny smile of welcome, and you saw the likeness then between the child and the father. The winning, beautiful features ; the fair, bright complexion ; the laughing blue eyes ; the gay, happy temperament : all were the same.

It was James Channing. Sunny Hamish, as he used to be called. He was but thirty ; a tall, well-proportioned, but as yet very slender man ; rising over six feet, altogether attractive, handsome to look upon. Nelly, forgetting her lecture, flew into his arms with a shout and a laugh, as she had into those of her mother.

“ And what may this young lady have been about that she has not come to see me before, this evening ?” he asked.

“ Nurse kept her out rather late, Hamish, for one thing, and I knew you were busy,” came the answer ; not from the child, but from Mrs. Channing.

“ Yes, I am very busy. I have not any minutes to give even to my darling Nelly to-night,” he fondly said, kissing the bright hair and the rosy lips. “ Nelly must go to bed and dream of papa instead.”

“ You’ll have time when the ship comes home, papa,” said the child.

“ Lots of time then.”

“ The ship is to be a book.”

“ Ay.”

“ And it will bring great luck ?”

“ Yes. Please God.”

The last words were murmured in a tone suddenly hushed to reverence ; low and happy ; hopeful with a great, glad, assured hope, cheering to listen to ; a trusted hope that lighted up the whole countenance of the man with its radiance, and shone forth in beams from his blue eyes. But he said no more ; not even to his wife and his little child could he speak of the sanguine joy that anticipation wrought within him.

With too many kisses to be counted, with good nights spoken yet and yet again, Nelly was released and disappeared with her mother. The child had been trained well. There was some indulgence on the parents’ side—perhaps that is indispensable in the case of an only child—but there was neither trouble nor rebellion on hers. Little Nelly Channing had been taught to obey good laws ; and, to do so, came to her naturally.

Mrs. Channing took her up stairs and turned into her own dressing-room, as usual. She

deemed it well that the child should say her prayers in solitude, and, always when practicable, in the same place. Nelly sat down of her own accord by her mother, and was quite still and quiet while a very few easy verses from the Bible were read to her ; and then she knelt down to say her simple prayers at her mother's knee.

“ God bless my darling little Nelly, and make her a good girl ! ” said Mrs. Channing, as she took her out and resigned her to the nurse.

“ Are you ready for tea, Hamish ? ” she asked when she went down stairs again.

“ Quite. But, Ellen, I think I shall have to trouble you to bring it to me to-night.”

“ Are you so very busy ? ”

“ Ay. Look here.”

He pointed with his pen to some papers on the table. “ Those are proof sheets : and I must get this manuscript in to-morrow, or they will not insert it in the next month’s number.”

“ Hamish, I hope you are not doing too much,” she gravely said. “ I don’t like this night-work.”

He laughed gleefully. “ Too much ! I only wish I had too much to do, Ellen. Never fear, dear.”

“I wish you would teach me to correct the proofs.”

“What an idea !”

“I shall teach myself, sir.”

“It would be waste of time, young lady. I could not let anybody go over my proofs but myself.”

“You vain fellow ! I wonder if self-conceit is indigenous to you literary men ? Are they all as vain as Hamish Channing ?”

He took up the pen-wiper and threw it at her. But somehow Ellen was not in a mood for much jesting to-night. She put the pen-wiper—a rosette of red cloth—on the table again, and went and stood in silence with her hand on his shoulder. He turned his head.

“What is it, love ?”

“Hamish, I would bring in your tea willingly ; you know it ; but I think it would do you more good to leave this work, if only for five minutes. And I have something to say to you.”

“Very well. I can’t come for a quarter of an hour. You are a regular martinet.”

Ellen Channing left him and sat down in the other room to wait ; and this will afford the opportunity for a word of explanation. Amidst the very very many people in all classes of life, high and low, on whom a cer-

tain recent panic had wrought its disastrous effects, was Hamish Channing. The bank, of which he had been manager in Helstonleigh, was drawn into the vortex by the failure of another bank, and went in its turn. Honourable men had to do with it ; they sacrificed their own property in the emergency, and not a creditor suffered ; every one was paid in full. It could not be reorganized, and it left Hamish without employment. His wife's father, Mr. Huntley, had been one of the principal shareholders, and on him had fallen the greater weight of the heavy loss. It fell, too, at a time when Mr. Huntley could not afford to sustain it. He possessed a large property in Canada, but it had latterly begun to yield him little or no return. Whether in consequence of local depreciation, or of mismanagement (or perhaps something worse) on the part of his agents there, he knew not, and he sent his son out to see. The young man (he was three or four years younger than Mrs. Channing, and quite inexperienced) seemed not to be able to grapple with the business ; he wrote home most confused and perplexing accounts, of which Mr. Huntley could make nothing. At length that gentleman resolved to go out himself ; and the letter we have heard Mrs. Channing alluding to to-day was

from him. It was the second news they had received, the first having merely announced his safe arrival : and the accounts this last contained were so gloomy that Ellen Channing would fain have kept them from her husband.

It must be distinctly understood that the failure of the bank in Helstonleigh was in no way connected with ill-management. Had a quorum of the wisest business-men in the world been at its head, they could neither have foreseen its downfall nor averted it. Therefore Hamish Channing came out of that, as he had out of every untoward thing all his life, untarnished in honour and in character. A small secretaryship was offered him in London, which he accepted ; and he removed to the great city, with his wife and little daughter, his goods and chattels, there to set up his tent. A very small income had been settled on Ellen when she married ; the larger portion of her fortune was to accrue to her on her father's death. Whether it would be much, or little, or *any*, under the altered state of affairs, it was impossible now to say.

But it was not on the secretaryship that Hamish Channing depended for fame or fortune. A higher and dearer hope was his. That Hamish possessed in a high degree that rarest of all God's gifts, true genius, he had

long known. Writers of talent the world has had, and had in abundance, men and women ; of real genius but few. Perhaps, after all, the difference is not very distinguishable by the general mass of readers. But, to those who possess it, its characteristics are unmistakable. The divine light (is it too much to call it so ?) that lies within them shines as a very beacon, pointing on to fame ; to honour ; above all, to appreciation : the knowledge that they are different from their fellow-mortals, of a higher and nobler and rarer order, and that the world will sometime recognize the fact and bow down in worship, is never absent from the consciousness of the inner heart.

But, with the gift, James Channing also possessed its almost invariably accompanying attribute : a refined sensitiveness of feeling. And that is a quality not too well calculated to do battle with rude, every-day life. Should the great hope within him ever meet with a stern, crushing disappointment, his inability to bear the shock would in all probability show itself in some very marked degree. No one but himself knew or suspected the extreme sensitiveness of his every feeling ; it had been hidden hitherto under the nonchalant ease of manner, the sunny temper which made Hamish Channing's great charm. When

the bank was broken up, and with it his home and his greater means of living, it was not felt by him as many another man would have felt it : for it seemed only to render more feasible the great aim of his life—the devoting himself to literature. Years ago he had begun to write : and the efforts were first efforts, somewhat crude, as all first efforts, whether given to the world or not, must of necessity be, but they bore unmistakably the stamp of genius. His appointment to the bank and his marriage interrupted his writing ; and his genius and pen had alike lain dormant for some six years. His wife's father, Mr. Huntley, had procured his later appointment to the London secretaryship, and Hamish did not venture to decline it and devote himself wholly to literature, as he would have liked to do. The pay, though small, was sure ; Ellen's income was smaller still, and they must live ; so he accepted it. His duties there occupied him from nine to four : and all his available time beyond that, early and late, was devoted to writing. The day's employment was regarded as but a temporary clog, to be given up as soon as he found his income from literature would justify it. To accomplish this desirable end, he was doing a great deal more than was good for him and

taking too little rest. In point of fact, he had, you see, two occupations, each one of which would have been sufficient for an industrious man. What of that? Hamish never so much as cast a thought to it.

Oh, with what a zest had he re-commenced the writing, laid aside for so long! It was like returning to some glad haven of rest. Joy filled his whole being. The past six years had been heavy with suppressed yearning; the yearning to be about the work for which he knew God had pre-eminently fitted him: but his duties had been onerous, his time nearly fully taken up; and when he would have snatched some moments from night for the dearer work, his wife and his anxious friends had risen up in arms against it, for he was not over-strong, and some delicacy of constitution was preached about. Besides, as Mr. Huntley said, a writing manager might alarm the bank's patronizers. But he had it all his own way now, and made good profit of his writings. Papers on social questions of the day, essays, stories, were in turn written, and taken by different periodicals. They *had* to be written, apart from other hopes and views, for the style in which they lived required additional means to support it, beyond his salary and his wife's money. It was not much style, after all, no

extravagance ; three maid-servants, and little company ; but everybody knows how money seems to melt in London.

He had been at this work now for a year. And his wife was beginning to grow anxious, for she knew he was doing too much, and told him he was wearing himself out. If he could but resign the secretaryship ! was ever in her secret hopes and thoughts just as much as his ; and she wished her father could get his Canadian affairs well settled, so as to allow the necessary addition to her income. Hamish laughed at this. He was living in a glad dream of future fame and fortune : that it would inevitably come, he felt as sure of as though it lay at hand now, ready to be picked up. He was writing a long work ; a work in three volumes ; and this was the precious gem on which all his hopes and love and visions were centred. The periodical writing had to be done, for its returns were needed ; but every spare moment, apart from that, was devoted to the book. A light of gladness beamed from his eyes ; a joy, sweet as the chords of some soothing melody, lay ever on his spirit. Oh, what is there of bliss and love in the world that can compare with this ! And it is known to so few ; so few : by all else it can never be so much as imagined. Do

not mistake it, you who read, for the pleasurable anticipation of a man or woman who may from chance causes have "taken up" the profession of literature, and look for the good, substantial and otherwise, that it is to bring. The two are wholly different: the one is born of heaven, the other of earth. But that man must live, Hamish Channing amidst the rest, the thought of *money* being one of the returns, would be distasteful; never, as I honestly believe, accepted as such without a blush: the dross of earth mingling with the spiritualized, exalted, pure joy of Eden. It is well that this same gift of genius with its dear pleasures and its attendant after-pains—for they come—should be vouchsafed to a unit amidst tens of thousands!

Mrs. Channing sat waiting for him; the tea standing before her, herself thoughtful. The room was of good size and handsomely furnished, its chairs and curtains of rich purple cloth. Their furniture had been a present from Mr. Huntley when they married, who was not one to do things niggardly. As Mrs. Channing sat, facing the inner door, the windows were behind her; the fire-place, with its ornaments and its large chimney-glass on her left; a piano on one side it, a white marble-topped cabinet with purple silk lining to its

glass-doors on the other ; and on her right, stood the sideboard, and other furniture. The inner room, used exclusively by Hamish for writing, had horsehair chairs, and a book-case running all along the side of the wall.

The door opened, and Hamish came in. He had a small bundle in his hand ; proof sheets done up for the post, and sent them out at once by the maid, as he sat down to tea. Which he seemed inclined to swallow at a gulp, and to eat his piece of bread-and-butter wholesale, ever anxious to get back to his labour and the glowing visions of promise connected with it.

“ Hamish, I do believe you like your writing better than you like me ! ” Ellen said to him one day almost passionately. And for answer, Mr. Hamish in his sauciness had said he was not sure but he did.

He sat there at tea, now, talking gaily as usual. His wife interrupted him, telling of the letter she had received, and its unfavourable news. He listened with his sunny smile.

“ I had great mind not to tell you at all, Hamish,” she confessed. “ Papa’s temperament is nearly as sanguine as yours ; and if he writes in poor spirits, saying he fears

it may turn out that he is a ruined man, I know things must be very bad."

"But why have hesitated to tell me, Ellen?"

"To save you anxiety. Don't you see what it implies? If papa loses his property, the fortune that would have been mine sometime will be lost too."

Had she been speaking of the probable loss of some mere trifle, he could scarcely have heard it with more equanimity. It seemed to Hamish that the future was, according to human foresight, in his own hands.

"Never mind, Ellen, we have a resource that cannot be lost. I will take care of you, Heaven aiding me; you shall have every needful and substantial good in abundance."

"Yes, that is just it. You work too much already: you would work more then."

Hamish laughed. "Do you know what I wish, Ellen? I wish the day were four-and-twenty hours long instead of twelve, and that I had two sets of brains and hands."

"How are you getting on?"

"Oh, so well. It is all right, my darling. And will be."

They were interrupted by a visitor—Mr. Roland Yorke. There had been a casual meeting once or twice, but this was the first

time he had been there. They invited him to come ; but Roland had the grace to be ashamed of a certain escapade of his in the days gone by, which brought disgrace for the time being on Arthur Channing, and he had rather held back from appearing. This he partially confessed.

“ It would have been so different, you know, Hamish, had I returned with a few millions from Port Natal, and gone home to atone to Arthur in the face and eyes of all the town, and done honour to him for what he is, the best man living, and heaped a fortune upon him. But I have not been able to do that. I’d rather rush off again to Port Natal and its troubles, than I’d go within miles of Helstonleigh.”

“ And so, to mend it, you thought you would keep miles away from me,” said Hamish, with his glad smile of welcome. “ I think there’s only one person in the world would be more glad to see you than I, and that’s Arthur himself.”

“ I know. I know what a good fellow you always were. But I hadn’t the face to come, you see. It was Annabel made me now.”

Suddenly shaking both their hands in the heartiest manner, with a grip that brought pain to Mrs. Channing, who wore rings,

Roland fell to at the tea. Hamish, remembering his appetite of old, rang the bell for some good things to be brought in ; and Roland was speedily in the midst of the most comfortable enjoyment, mentally and bodily. He gave them his own confidence without the least reserve, both as to present and past ; gravely telling everything, including the nearly-embraced hot-pie scheme of commerce, which made Hamish hold his sides, and the having met Gerald at Mrs. Bede Greatorex's party.

“ I rather expect Gerald here this evening,” remarked Hamish.

“ Do you ?” said Roland, his mouth full of savoury pie. “ He won’t be too pleased to see me ; he means to cut me, I’m nearly sure. Do you see much of him, Hamish ?”

Hamish explained that he did. They were both in the literary line ; and Gerald had some good engagements as a reviewer.

“ Where’s his wife ?” asked Roland. “ Yes, please, Mrs. Channing, another cup ; plenty of milk and sugar.”

“ In the country ; somewhere in Gloucestershire. Gerald is not too communicative on that score.”

“ Don’t you think, Hamish, he must have

been a great duffer to go and marry before he knew how he could keep a wife?"

Hamish raised his eyebrows with the good-natured indifferent manner that Roland so well remembered in the days gone by; but answer made he none. Where Hamish Channing could not praise, he would not blame. Even by his immediate relatives Gerald's imprudent marriage was tacitly ignored, and the Lady Augusta Yorke had threatened to box Roland's ears in Ireland, when he persisted in asking about it.

"I always knew Gerald would not go into the Church," remarked Roland. "*I* wouldn't; they say Tod threatened to run off to sea if they talked to *him* of it: somehow we boys have a prejudice against following my father's calling. I'll tell you a secret, Hamish: if a fellow wants to be *made*, to have his nonsense knocked out of him, he must go to Port Natal. Do you remember the morning you saw me decamping off for London on my way to it?"

"Don't I," said Hamish, his lips parting with merriment at the remembrance. "There was commotion that day at Helstonleigh, Roland; in Galloway's office especially."

"And dear old Arthur buried his wrongs and went to the rescue; and poor dying Jen-

kins got out of his bed to help. He was nothing but a calf, poor fellow, a reed in Mrs. J.'s hands, but he was good as gold. I say, *she's altered.*"

"Is she?"

Roland nodded. "The going to Port Natal made me, Hamish," he resumed; and Hamish was slightly surprised at the serious tone. "I should have been one of the idlest of the family batch but for the lesson I got read to me there. I went out to make my fortune; instead of making it, I had to battle with ill-fate, and ill-fate won the day. They call it names of course; a mistaken enterprise, a miserable failure; but it was just the best thing that could have happened for me. I was a proud, stuck-up ignoramus; I should have depended on Carrick, or anybody else, to get my living for me; but I mean now to earn it for myself."

When Hamish went to his work later, leaving Ellen to entertain their guest, Roland followed him with his eyes.

There was a change in Hamish Channing, apparent to one even as unobservant as Roland. The face was thinner than of yore; its refined features were paler; they looked etherealized, as it seemed to Roland. The sweet-natured temperament was there still, but some

of its once gay lightness had given place to thought. The very frequent mocking tone had been nearly entirely laid aside for one of loving considerateness to all.

“What are you looking at?” questioned Ellen, struck with Roland’s fixed gaze and unusual seriousness.

“At him. He is so changed.”

“Older, do you mean?”

“Law bless you, no. Of course he *is* older by more than seven years; but he is *very* young-looking still; he does not look so old as I do, and I am two years his junior. I used to think Hamish Channing the handsomest fellow living, but he was nothing then to what he is now. I hope you won’t consider it’s wrong of me to say it, Mrs. Channing, but there’s something in his face now that makes one think of Heaven.”

“Mr. Yorke!”

“There! I knew what it would be. Mr. Ollivera flies out at me when I say wrong things. Other people don’t say them. It must have been that Port Natal. I thought I was dead once, over there,” added Roland, passing on to another topic with his usual abruptness.

Ellen smiled; she had spoken in surprise only. Roland Yorke, who had brought his

chair round to the fire, sat opposite to her, his elbow on his knee, his head bent forward.

“ I don’t mean that it makes one think he is going to Heaven—going to die before his time ; you need not be afraid, Mrs. Channing. It was not that kind of thought at all ; only that the angels and people about, up there, must have just such faces as Hamish’s ; good, and pure, and beautiful ; and just the same sweet expression, and the same loving-kindness in the tone of voice.”

Roland stopped and pulled at his dark whiskers. Mrs. Channing began to think *he* had also changed for the better.

“ Many a one, remembering the past, would have just turned their backs upon me, Mrs. Channing. Instead of that, he is as glad to see me, and makes me as cordially welcome as if I were a lord, or a prize pig sent him at Christmas. What did I nearly die of ? you ask. Well, of fever ; but I got all sorts of horrid torments. I had the eye-epidemic ; it’s caused by the dust, and I thought I was going blind. Then I had what they call Natal sores, a kind of boil ; then I nearly had a sun-stroke ; the heat’s something awful, you know. And I got the ticks everlastingly.”

“ Do you mean the *tic-douloureux* ?”

“ Law bless you ! A Port Natal tick is an

insect. It sits on the top of the grass waiting for you to pass by and darts into your legs ; and no earthly thing will get it off again, except tugging at it with tweezers. They have no wings or mouth, nothing but a pair of lancets and a kind of pipe for a body, covered with spikes. Oh, they *are* nice things. When I set up that store for leeches and candles and pickled pork, I used to go and get the leeches myself, to save buying ; lots of them grow in the rivulets round about ; but I would bring home a vast many more ticks than leeches, and that didn't pay, you know. Where's the little thing?"

" Nelly ? She has gone to bed."

" She is the prettiest child I ever saw."

" She is just like her papa," said Mrs. Channing, whose cheeks were flushing softly with pardonable love and pride at the praise of her child.

" So she is. When will his book be out ?"

" Ah, I don't know. He is getting on quickly, he tells me. I think he is a ready writer."

" I suppose most men of genius are that," remarked Roland. " He does not talk much about it, does he ?"

" Not at all. A very little to me. These wonderful hopes and dreams that lie down

deep within us, and go to make up the concealed inner life of our dearest feelings, cannot be spoken of to the world. I have none," she added, slightly laughing; "I am more practical."

"Hamish is so hopeful! It is his temperament."

"*Hopeful!*" repeated Mrs. Channing; "indeed he is: like nothing I ever saw. You have heard of day-dreams, Mr. Yorke; well, this book is his day-dream. He works at it late and early, almost night and day. I tell him sometimes he must be wearing himself out."

"One never does really wear out from work, Mrs. Channing. I used to think I was wearing out at old Galloway's; but I didn't know what work was until I got to Natal. I learnt it then."

"Did you sit up to work at nights at Port Natal?"

"Only when I had not got a bed to go to," answered candid Roland. "Mine was not that kind of work, sitting up to burn the midnight oil; it lay in knocking about."

"That's quite different."

"What puzzles me more than anything is, that Gerald should have turned author," resumed Roland. "Henry Ollivera was talking

about genius at our place the other day. Why, according to what he described it to be, Gerald Yorke must have about as much genius as a walking gander."

Ellen laughed. "Hamish says Gerald has no real genius," she said. "But he has a good deal of talent. He is what may be called a dashing writer."

"Well, I don't know," disputed Roland, who was hard of belief in these alleged qualities of his brother. "I remember in the old days at home, when Gerald was at the college-school, he couldn't be got to write a letter. If Lady Augusta wanted him to write a letter to Carrick, or to George out in India, she would have to din at him for six months. He hated it like poison."

"That may have been idleness."

"Oh, we all went in for that," acknowledged Roland. "I should have been a very lazy beggar to the end of time but for the emigration to Port Natal."

CHAPTER XII.

COMMOTION IN THE OFFICE OF GREATOREX AND GREATOREX.

THE summer sun, scorching the walls of houses and the street pavements with its heat and its glare, threw itself in great might into the offices of Greatorex and Greatorex. Josiah Hurst and Roland Yorke were at their desk, writing side by side. Jenner was at his, similarly occupied ; Mr. Brown was holding a conversation in an undertone with some stranger, who had entered with him as he came in from an errand : a man of respectable, staid appearance. Something in the cut of his clothes spoke of the provinces ; and Roland Yorke, who never failed to look after other people's affairs, however pressing his own might be, decided that the stranger was a countryman, come up to see the sights of London.

“ Which I can’t, except from the outside,” grumbled Roland to himself. “ It’s an awful

sell to have to go about with empty pockets. I wonder who the fellow is?—he has been whispering there twenty minutes if he's been one. He looks as if he had plenty in *his*."

Mr. Bede Greatorex came in and took his place at his desk. The head-clerk drew his head away from close proximity with his friend's, and commenced work; a hint to the stranger that their gossip must be at an end.

The latter asked for a pen and ink, wrote a few words on a leaf he tore from his pocket-book, folded it in two, and gave it to Mr. Brown.

"That is my address in town," he said. "Let me see you to-night. I leave to-morrow at mid-day."

"Good," replied Mr. Brown, glancing at the writing on the paper.

The stranger went out, lifting his hat to the room generally, and Mr. Brown put the paper away in his pocket.

"Who was that?" asked Mr. Bede Greatorex.

"A gentleman I used to know, sir, a farmer," was the reply. "I met him outside just now, and he came in with me. We got talking of old times."

"Oh, I thought it was some one on busi-

ness for the office," said Mr. Bede Greatorex, half in apology for inquiring. His face looked worn as usual, his eyes bright and restless. Some of the family could remember that when the late Mrs. Greatorex had first shown symptoms of the malady that killed her, *her* eyes had been unnaturally bright.

The work went on. The clocks drew near to twelve, and the sun in the heavens grew fiercer. Roland began to look white and flustered. What with the work and what with the heat, he thought he might as well be roughing it at Port Natal. He was doing pretty well on the whole—for him—and did not get lectures above four times a week. To help liking Roland was impossible; with his frank manners, his free good-nature, his unsophisticated mind, and his candid revelations in regard to himself, that would now and again plunge the office into private convulsions. It was also within the range of possibility that his good connections, and the fact of his being free of the house, running up at will to pay unexpected visits to Mrs. Greatorex, had their due weight in Mr. Brown's mind; for breaches of office etiquette were tolerated in Roland that certainly would not have been in any other clerk, whether he was a gentleman or not. Roland had chosen to

constitute himself a kind of *enfant de la maison*; he and his brothers and sisters had been intimate with the Joliffe girls; he could remember once having nearly got up a fight with Louisa,—now Mrs. Bede Greatorex; and, to make Roland understand that in running up-stairs when he chose, darting in upon Mrs. Greatorex as she sat in her boudoir or drawing-room, darting in upon Miss Channing as she gave lessons to Jane Greatorex, he was intruding where he ought not, would have been a hopeless task. Once or twice Mr. Bede Greatorex had voluntarily invited him up to luncheon or dinner; and so Roland made himself free of the house, and in a degree swayed the office.

They were very busy to-day. The work which he and Hurst and Jenner had in hand was being waited for, so that Roland had to stick to it, in spite of the relaxing heat, and fully decided he could not be worse off at Port Natal. The scratching of the pens was going on pretty equally, when Frank Greatorex came in.

“I want a cheque from you, Bede.”

“Where’s Mr. Greatorex?” returned Bede in answer; for it was to him such applications were made in general.

“Gone out.”

Bede put aside the deed he had been sedulously examining, went into his private room, and came back with his cheque-book.

“How much?” he asked of his brother, as he sat down.

“Forty-four pounds. Make it out to Sir Richard Yorke.”

With a simultaneous movement, as it seemed, two of those present raised their heads to look at Frank Greatorex: Roland Yorke and Mr. Brown. The former was no doubt attracted by the sound of his kinsman’s name; what aroused Mr. Brown’s attention did not appear, but he stared for a moment in a kind of amazement.

“Upon consideration, I don’t think I’ll take the cheque with me now; I will call for it later in the day, when I’ve been into the city,” spoke a voice at the door; and Sir Richard Yorke appeared. Bede, who was just then signing the cheque, “Greatorex and Greatorex,” finished the signature, and came forward to shake hands.

“How d’ye do, sir,” spoke up Roland.

Sir Richard’s little eyes peered out over his fat face, and he condescended to recognise his nephew by a nod. Bede Greatorex spoke a few words to the baronet, touching the matter in hand, and turned back to his desk, leaving

Frank to escort the old gentleman out. Bede, about to cross the cheque, hesitated.

“Did Mr. Frank say a crossed cheque?” he asked, looking up.

“No, sir; he said simply a cheque,” said Jenner, finding nobody else answered.

“Yes,” broke out Roland, “it’s fine to be that branch of the family. Getting their cheques for forty-four pounds! I wish I could get one for forty-four shillings.”

“Have the goodness to attend to your own business, Mr. Yorke.”

Bede Greatorex left the cheque uncrossed. In a few minutes, after putting things to rights on his desk, he gathered up his papers, including the cheque and cheque-book, and went into his room. Putting the things altogether into his desk there,—for he had an engagement at twelve, and the hour was within a minute or two of striking,—he locked it and went out by the other door, not coming into the front room again.

Now it happened that Bede Greatorex, who had expected to be absent half an hour at the longest, was unavoidably detained, so that when Sir Richard Yorke returned for his cheque it could not be given to him. Mr. Greatorex, however, was at home then, and drew out another. And the day went on.

“ You must cancel that cheque, Bede,” Mr. Greatorex casually observed to his son that same evening, after office-hours. “ It was very unbusiness-like to leave it locked up, when you were not sure of coming back in time to give it to Sir Richard.”

“ But I thought I was sure. It does not matter.”

“ If you will bring me those title-deeds of Cardwell’s, I’ll go over them myself quietly, and see what I can make out,” said Mr. Greatorex.

Bede crossed the passage to his private room, and unlocked his desk. The deeds Mr. Greatorex asked for were the same that he had been examining in the front office in the morning. Some flaw had been discovered in them, or was suspected, and it was likely to give the office some trouble, which would fall on Bede’s head. There they lay inside the desk, just as Bede had placed them in the morning, with the paper-weight upon them; detained at Westminster until a late hour, he had not been to his desk since. Reminded by his father to destroy the cheque—useless now—Bede thought he would do it at once.

But he could not find it. Other papers, besides the title-deeds, cheque, and cheque-book, he had placed within, and he went care-

fully over them all, one by one. Nothing was missing, nothing had apparently been touched, but the cheque certainly was not there. He searched his desk in the front office, quite for form's sake, for he knew that he had carried the cheque with him to his private room.

"One would think you had been drawing out the deeds," remarked Mr. Greatorex when he returned.

"I can't find that cheque," answered Bede.

"Not find the cheque!" repeated Mr. Greatorex. "What do you mean, Bede?"

Bede gave a short history of the affair. He had been in a hurry; and, instead of staying to put the cheque and cheque-book into his cash-box, had left them loose in his table-desk with the title-deeds and sundry other papers.

"But you *locked* your desk?" cried Mr. Greatorex.

"Assuredly. I have only unlocked it now. The cheque would be as safe there as in the cash-box."

"You could not have put it in, Bede; it must be somewhere about."

"I am just as certain that I put it in, as I am that it is not there now."

Mr. Greatorex did not believe it. Bede had been for some time showing himself less the keen, exact man of business he used to be.

Trifling mistakes, inaccuracies, negligences, would come to light now and again ; vexing Mr. Greatorex beyond measure.

“ I don’t know what to make of you of late, Bede,” he said after a pause. “ You know the complaints we have been obliged to hear. These very title-deeds”—putting his hand on those just brought in—“ it was you who examined and passed them. One negligence or another comes cropping up continually, and they may all be traced to you. Is your state of health the cause ?”

“ I suppose so,” replied Bede, who felt conscious the reproach was merited.

“ You had better take some rest for a time. If—.”

“ No,” came the hasty interruption, as though the proposal were unpalatable. “ Work is better for me than idleness. Put me out of harness, and I should knock up.”

“ Bede,” said Mr. Greatorex, in a tone of considerate kindness, but with some hesitation, “ it appears to me that you get more of a changed man day by day. You have not been the same since your marriage. I fear the cause, or a great portion of it, lies in *her* ; I fear she gives you trouble. As you know, I have never spoken to you before of this ; I have abstained from doing so.”

A flush, that had shown itself in the clear olive face when Mr. Greatorex began to speak, faded to whiteness ; the hand, that accidentally touched his father's, felt fevered in all its veins.

“ At least, my wife is not the cause of my illness,” he answered in a low tone.

“ I don't know that, Bede. That a great worry lies on your heart continually, that a kind of restless, nervous anxiety never leaves you by night or by day, is sufficiently plain to me ; I know that it can only arise from matters connected with your wife : and I also know that this, and this alone, tells upon your bodily health. Your wife's extravagance is bringing you care : ruin will surely supervene if you do not check it.”

Bede Greatorex opened his lips to speak, but seemed to think better of it, and closed them again. His brow was knitted into two upright lines.

“ Unless you can do so, Bede, I shall be compelled to make an alteration in our arrangements. In justice to myself and to my other children, your name must be withdrawn from the firm. Not yourself and your profits : only the name, as a matter of safety.”

Bede Greatorex bit his lips. His father's heart ached for him. For a long while Mr.

Greatorex had seen that his son's unhappy state of mind (and that it was unhappy no keen observer, much with him, could mistake) arose through his wife. And he thought Bede a fool for putting up with her.

"You need not be afraid," said Bede. "I will take care the firm's interests are not affected."

"How can you take care?" retorted Mr. Greatorex, in rather a stern tone. "When debts are being made daily in the most reckless manner: debts that you know nothing of, until the bills come trooping in and you are called upon to pay, can you answer for what it will go on to? Can I? Many a richer man than either of us, Bede, has been brought to the Bankruptcy Court through less than this. Ay, and I will tell you what else, Bede—it has brought husbands to the grave. When people remark to me, 'Your son Bede looks ill,' I quietly answer 'Do you think so?' when all the while I am secretly wondering that you can look even as well as you do."

"Who remarks on it?" asked Bede.

"Who! Many people. Only the other night, when Henry Ollivera was here, he spoke of it."

"Let Henry Ollivera concern himself with

his own affairs," was the fierce answer. "Does he want to be a——"

Bede's voice dropped to an inaudible whisper. But the concluding words had sounded like—"curse amongst us."

"Bede! Did you say *curse*?"

"I said *king*," answered Bede. His nostrils were working, his lips were quivering, his chest was heaving; all with a passion he was trying to suppress. Mr. Greatorex looked at him, and waited. He had seen Bede in these intemperate fits of anger before: sometimes for no apparent cause.

"We will go back to the starting-point, this cheque, Bede," he quietly said. "You must have overlooked it. Go and search your desk again."

Bede was leaving the room when he met a servant coming to it with a message. Mr. Yorke had called, and wished to see Mr. Greatorex for a couple of minutes: his business was important.

The notion of Roland Yorke and important business being in connexion, brought a smile to the face of Mr. Greatorex. He told the servant to send him in.

But instead of Roland, it was the son of Sir Richard Yorke who advanced. A very fashionable gentleman in evening dress, small

and slight, with white hands, a lisp, and a silky moustache. He had come about the cheque.

Sir Richard, fatigued with his visit to the city, had gone straight home to Portland Place, after receiving the cheque from Mr. Greatorex, and sent his son to the bankers' to get it cashed: a branch office of the London and Westminster. The clerk, before he cashed it, looked at it rather attentively, and then went away for a minute.

"We have cashed one cheque before to-day, sir, precisely similar to this," he said on his return. "Would Sir Richard be likely to have two cheques from Greatorex and Greatorex in one day, each drawn for the same amount—forty-four pounds?"

"Greatorex and Greatorex are my father's men of business: he went to get some money from them to-day, I know; I suppose he chose to receive it in two cheques instead of one," replied Mr. Yorke haughtily, for he deemed the question an impertinence. "Sir Richard may have wished to pay the half of it away."

The clerk counted out the money and said no more. The cheques were undoubtedly genuine, the first made out in the well-known hand of Bede Greatorex, the last in that of his father, and the clerk supposed it was all

right. Mr. Yorke sent the money up to Sir Richard when he got home, and went out again. At dinner-time, he mentioned what the clerk had said—"Insolent fellah!"—and the old baronet, who knew of the fact of two cheques having been drawn, took alarm.

"He'd not let me wait an instant; sent me off here before I'd well tasted my soup," grumbled Mr. Yorke. "One of you had better come and see him if the cheque *has* been lost and cashed; or he'll ask me five hundred questions which I can't answer, and fret himself into a fit. He has had one fit, you know. As to the cheque, it must have got into the hands of some clever thief, who made haste to reap the benefit of it."

"And your desk must have been picked, Bede, if you are sure you put it in," observed Mr. Greatorex.

"I am sure of that," answered Bede. "But I don't see how the desk can have been picked. Not a thing in it was displaced, and the lock is uninjured."

Bede had a frightful headache—which was the cause of his looking somewhat worse than usual that evening, so Mr. Greatorex went to Sir Richard Yorke's. And in coming home he passed round by Scotland Yard.

On the following morning, sitting in his

room, he held a conference with his two sons, whom he had not seen on his return the previous night.

“They think at Scotland Yard it must inevitably have been one of the clerks in your room, Bede,” said Mr. Greatorex.

“One would think it, but that it seems so very unlikely,” answered Bede. “Brown and Jenner have been with us quite long enough for their honesty to be proved ; and the other two are gentlemen.”

“Their theory is this ; that some one, possessing easy access to your private room, opened the desk with a false key.”

“For the matter of that, the clerks on our side the house could obtain nearly if not quite as easy access to Bede’s room through its other door,” observed Frank Greatorex.

“Yes. But you forget, Frank, that none of them on our side the house knew of the cheque having been drawn out and left there. Jelf will be in by-and-by.”

The morning’s letters, recently delivered, lay before Mr. Greatorex in a stack, and he began to look at them one by one before opening ; his common custom. He came to one addressed to Bede, marked “Private” on both sides, and tossed it to his son !

Bede opened it. There was an inner envelope

lope, sealed, and addressed and marked just like the outer one, which Bede opened in turn. Frank Greatorex, standing near his brother, was enabled to see that but a few lines formed its contents. Almost in a moment, before Bede could have read the whole, he crushed the letter together and thrust it into his pocket. Frank laughed.

“Your correspondent takes his precautions, Bede. Was he afraid that Mrs. Bede——”

The words were but meant in jest, but Frank did not finish them. Bede turned from the room with a kind of staggering movement, his face blanched, his whole countenance livid with some awful terror. Frank simply stared after him, unable to say another word.

“What was that?” cried Mr. Greatorex, looking up at the abrupt silence.

“I don’t know,” said Frank. “Bede seems moonstruck with that letter he has had. It must contain tidings of some bother or other.”

“Then rely upon it, it is connected with his wife,” severely spoke Mr. Greatorex.

The news relating to the cheque fell upon the office like a clap of thunder. Every clerk in it felt uncomfortable, especially those attached to Mr. Bede’s department. The clerk

at the bank, who had cashed the cheque, was questioned. It had been presented at the bank early in the afternoon, about half-past one o'clock he said, or between that and two. He had not taken notice of the presenter, but seemed to remember that he was a tall dark man, with black whiskers. Had taken it and cashed it quite as a matter of course ; making no delay or query ; it was a common thing for strangers, that is strangers to the bank, to present the cheques of Greatorex and Greatorex. No ; he had not taken the number of the notes, for the best of all possible reasons—that he had paid it in gold, as requested. This clerk happened also to be the one to whom Sir Richard Yorke's son had presented the second cheque ; he spoke to that gentleman of the fact of having cashed one an hour or two before, exactly similar ; but Mr. Yorke seemed to intimate that it was all right ; in short appeared offended at the subject being named to him.

At present that comprised all the information they possessed.

It was Mr. Bede Greatorex who made the communication to the clerks in his room. He was sitting at his desk in the front office when they arrived,—an unusual circumstance ; and when all were assembled and had settled to

their several occupations, then he entered upon it. The cheque he had drawn out, as they might remember, on the previous morning for Sir Richard Yorke, and which he had locked up subsequently in his table-desk in the other room, had been abstracted from it, and cashed at the bank. He spoke in a quiet, friendly manner, just in the same tone he might have related it to a friend, not appearing to cast the least thought of possible suspicion upon any one of them. Nevertheless, no detective living could have watched their several demeanours, as they heard it, more keenly than did Mr. Bede Greatorex.

The clerks seemed thunderstruck. Three of them gazed at him, unable for the moment to shape any reply ; the other burst out at once.

“ The cheque gone ! Stolen out of the desk, and cashed at the bank ! My goodness ! Who took it, sir ?”

That the words came from nobody but Roland, you may be sure. Mr. Bede Greatorex went on to give a few explanatory details ; and Roland’s next movement was to rush into the adjoining room without asking permission, and give a few tugs to the lid of the table-desk. Back he clattered in a commotion.

And here let it be remarked, en passant, that it is somewhat annoying to have to apply so frequently the word "clatter" to Roland's progress, imparting no doubt a good deal of unnecessary sameness. But there is really no other graphic expression that can be found to describe it. His steps were quick, and the soles of his boots made noise enough for ten.

"I say, Mr. Bede Greatorex," he exclaimed, "it is no light hand that could open that desk without a key. I've had experience in lifting weights over at Port Natal when helping to load the ships with coal——"

"Kindly oblige me by making less noise, Mr. Yorke," came the interrupting reproof.

Which Roland seemed not to heed in the least. He tilted himself on to a high stool in the middle of the room, his legs dangling, just as though he had been at a free-and-easy meeting; and there he sat, staring in consternation.

"Will the bank know the fellow again that cashed it?"

"My opinion is that the desk was opened with a key in the ordinary way," observed Mr. Bede Greatorex, referring to a previous remark of Roland's, but passing over his present question.

“Perhaps you left your keys about?” suggested Roland.

“I did not leave them about, Mr. Yorke. I had them with me.”

“Well, this is a go! *I say!*” he resumed, with quite a burst of excitement, his eyes beaming, his face glowing, “who’ll be at the loss of the money? Old Dick Yorke?”

“Ah, that is a nice question,” said Bede Greatorex.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” interposed Mr. Brown, who had been very thoughtful. “Don’t you think you must be mistaken in supposing you put the cheque in the desk? I could understand it all so easily if——”

“I know I put it in my desk, and left it there locked up,” said Mr. Bede Greatorex, stopping the words. “What were you about to say?”

“If you had carried the cheque out inadvertently, and dropped it in the street,” concluded Mr. Brown, “it would have been quite easy to understand then. Some unprincipled man might have picked it up, and made off at once to the bank with it, hazarding the risk.”

“But I did nothing of the sort,” said Bede: and Mr. Brown shook his head, as if he were hard of conviction.

“Of course there’s not much difference in the degree of guilt, but many a man who would not for the world touch a locked desk might appropriate a picked-up cheque, sir.”

“I tell you, the cheque was taken from my desk,” reiterated Mr. Bede Greatorex, slightly irritated at the persistency.

“Well, sir, then all I can say is, that it is an exceedingly disagreeable thing for every one of us,” said the head-clerk.

“I do not wish to imply that it is,” said Bede Greatorex. “Mr. Yorke, allow me to suggest that sitting on that stool will not do your work.”

“I *hope* old Dick will be the one to lose it!” cried Roland, with fervour, as he quitted the stool for his place by Mr. Hurst. “Forty-four pounds! it’s stunning. He’s the meanest old chap alive, Mr. Greatorex. I’d almost have taken it myself from him.”

“*Did* you take it?” questioned Hurst in a whisper.

“What’s that?” retorted Roland.

He faced Hurst as he spoke, waiting for a reply. All in a moment the proud countenance and bearing changed. The face fell, the clear eyes looked away, the brow became suffused with crimson. Hurst saw the signs, and felt sorry for what he had said; had said

in thoughtlessness rather than in any real meaning. For he knew that it had recalled to Roland Yorke a terrible escapade of his earlier life.

CHAPTER XIII.

TAKING THE PLACE OF JELF.

“ It will stick in my gizzard for ever. I can see that. An awful clog, it is, when a fellow has dropped into mischief once in his life, and repented and atoned for it, that it must be cast in his teeth always ; cropping up at any hour, like a dead donkey in the Thames ; I might as well have stayed at Port Natal !”

Such was the inward soliloquy of Mr. Roland Yorke as he bent over his writing after that overwhelming question of Hurst’s, “ Did you take it ?” Hurst, really grieved at having hurt his feelings, strove to smooth away what he had said.

“ I beg your pardon, old fellow,” he whispered. “ On my honour I spoke without thought.”

“ I dare say you did !” retorted Roland.

“ I meant no harm, Roland ; I did not indeed. Nothing connected with the past occurred to me.”

"You know it *did*," was the answer, and Roland turned his grieved face full on Hurst. "You know you wanted to bring up that miserable time when I stole the twenty-pound note from old Galloway, and let the blame of it fall on Arthur Channing. Because I took that, you think I have taken this!"

"Hush! You'll have them hear you, Yorke."

"That's what you want. Why don't you go and tell them?" demanded Roland, who was working himself into a passion. "Proclaim it aloud. Ring the bell, as the town-crier does at home on a market-day. Call Greatorex and Brown and Jenner up from their desks. Where's the good of taunting me in private?"

Hurst kept his head down and wrote on in silence, hoping to allay the storm he had inadvertently provoked. In spite of his protestations, he *had* spoken in reference to that past transaction, and the tone showed the truth to Roland; but still he had spoken thoughtlessly. Roland, as he believed, was no more guilty of this present loss than he himself was; and he felt inclined to clip his tongue out for its haste.

Pushing his hair from his hot face, biting his lips, drawing deep breaths in his anger

and emotion, stood Roland. Presently the pen was dashed down on the parchment before him, blotting it and defacing it for use, but of course that went for nothing, and Roland stalked to the desk of Mr. Bede Greatorex.

“I wish to say, sir, that I did not steal the cheque.”

The words took Mr. Bede Greatorex by surprise. But he had by this time become pretty well acquainted with Roland and his impulsive ways ; he liked him in spite of his faults as a clerk ; otherwise he would never have put up with them. A pleasant smile crossed his lips as he answered ; answered in jest.

“ You know the old French proverb, I dare say, Mr. Yorke : ‘ Qui s’excuse s’accuse’ ? ”

Roland made nothing of French at the best of times : at such as these, every pulse within him agitated to pain, it was about as intelligible as Hebrew. But, had he understood every word of the joking implication, he could not have responded with more passionate earnestness.

“ I did not touch the cheque, sir ; I swear it. I never saw it after you took it from this room, or knew where you put it, or anything. It never once came into my thoughts.”

“ But why do you trouble yourself to say

this?" asked Mr. Bede Greatorex, speaking seriously when he noticed the anxious tone, the emotion accompanying the denial. "No one thought of supposing you had taken it."

"Hurst did, sir. He accused me."

Hurst, in his vexation, pushed his work from him in a heap. Of all living mortals, surely Roland was the simplest! he had no more tact than a child. Mr. Bede Greatorex looked from one to the other.

"I did nothing of the kind," said Hurst, speaking quietly. "The fact is, Roland Yorke can't take a joke. When he made that remark about his uncle, Sir Richard, I said to him 'Did you take the cheque?' speaking in jest of course; and he caught up the question as serious."

"There, go to your place, Mr. Yorke," said Bede.

"I'd not do such a thing as touch a cheque for the world; or any other money that was not mine: no, not though it did belong to old Dick Yorke," earnestly reiterated Roland, keeping his ground.

"Of course you would not. Don't be foolish, Mr. Yorke."

"You believe me, I hope, sir."

"Certainly. Do go to your desk. I am busy."

Roland went back to it now, his face brighter. And Bede Greatorex thought with a smile how like a boy he was, in spite of his eight-and-twenty years, and his travels in Port Natal. These single-minded natures never grow old, or wise in the world's ways.

Another minute, and a stranger had entered the office. And yet, not quite a stranger; for Bede Greatorex had seen him some few years before, and Hurst and Roland Yorke knew him at once. It was Mr. Butterby; more wiry than he used to be, more observant about the keen eyes. He had come in reference to the loss of the cheque, and saluted Mr. Bede Greatorex: who looked surprised and not best pleased to see him. Jelf, the officer expected, was a man in whom Bede had confidence; of this one's skill he knew nothing.

"It was Sergeant Jelf whom we desired to see," said Bede, speaking with curt sharpness.

"It was," amicably replied Mr. Butterby. "Jelf got a telegram this morning, and had to go off unexpected. I'm taking his place for a bit."

"Have you changed your abode from Helstonleigh to London?"

"Only tempory. My head-quarters is always at Helstonleigh. And now about this matter, Mr. Bede Greatorex?"

“I think we need not trouble you. It can wait until Sergeant Jelf returns.”

“It might have to wait some time then,” was Mr. Butterby’s answer. “Jelf is off to Rooshia first; St. Petersburgh; and it’s hard to say how long he’ll stay there or where he may have to go to next. It’s all right, sir; I’ve been for this ten minutes with Mr. Greatorex, have learnt the particulars of the case, and got his instructions.”

Bede Greatorex bit his lip. This man, associated in his mind with that past trouble—the death of John Ollivera, who had been so dear to him, who was so bitterly regretted still—was rather distasteful to Bede than otherwise, and for certain other reasons he would have preferred Jelf. There seemed however no help for it, as his father had given the man his instructions.

Mr. Butterby turned his attention on the clerks. As a preliminary step to proceedings, he peered at them one by one under his eyebrows, while apparently studying the maps on the walls. Hurst favoured him with a civil nod.

“How d’ye do, Butterby?” said Roland Yorke. “You don’t get much fatter, Butterby.”

Mr. Butterby’s answer to this was to stare

at Roland for a full minute; as if he could not believe his own eyes at seeing him there.

“That looks like Mr. Roland Yorke!”

“And it is him,” said Roland. “He is a clerk here. Now then, Butterby!”

“I beg to state that I have full confidence in all my clerks,” interposed Mr. Bede Greatorex.

“Just so,” acquiesced the detective. “Mr. Greatorex senior thinks the same. But it is requisite that I should put a few questions to them, for all that. I can’t see my way clear until I shall have ascertained the movements of every individual clerk this house employs, from the time the cheque was put into your desk yesterday, sir. And I mean to do it,” he concluded with equable composure.

He was proceeding to examine the clerks, holding a worn note-book in his hand to pencil down any answer that might strike him, when Bede Greatorex again interposed, conscious that this might be looked upon by some of them as an unpardonable indignity.

“I cannot think this necessary, Mr. Butterby. We place every confidence in our clerks; I repeat it emphatically. Mr. Brown and Mr. Jenner have been with me for some years now; Mr. Hurst and Mr. Yorke are gentlemen.”

“I know who they two are ; knew them long before you did, sir ; and their fathers too. Dr. Yorke, the late prebendary, put some business into my hands once. But now, just leave this matter with me, Mr. Bede Greatorex. Your father has done me the honour to leave it in my hands ; and, excuse me for saying it, so must you. All these four, now present to hear you mention their names with respect, understand just as well that what I do is an ordinary matter of form the law’s officers require to be gone through, as if I paid ‘em the compliment to say so.”

“Oh, very well,” said Bede, acquiescing more cheerfully. “Step in to my private room with me for a moment first, Mr. Butterby.”

He held the door open as he spoke ; but, before the officer could turn to it, Mr. Greatorex came in. Bede shut the door again, and nodded to Mr. Butterby as much as to say, “Never mind now.”

And so the questioning of the clerks began. Mr. Greatorex stayed for a short while to listen to it, and talked to them all in a friendly manner, as if to show that the procedure was not instituted in consequence of any particular suspicion, rather as an investigation in which the house, masters and clerks, were

alike interested. The head-clerk went on with his work during the investigation as calmly as if Mr. Butterby had been a simple client ; the questions put to him, as to his own movements on the previous day, he answered quietly, calmly, and satisfactorily. Roland never wrote a single line during the whole time ; he did nothing but stare ; and made comments with his usual freedom. When his turn came to receive the officer's polite attention, he exploded a little and gave very insolent retorts, out of what Mr. Butterby saw was sheer contrariness.

The inquiry narrowed itself to this side of the house ; the rest of the clerks being able to prove, individually, that they had not been near Mr. Bede's room during the suspicious hours on the previous day. Whereas it appeared, after some considerable sifting, that each one of these four could have entered it at will, and unseen. What with the intervening dinner-hour, and sundry out-door commissions, every one of them had been left alone in the office separately for a greater or less period of time. It also came out that, with the exception of Jenner, each had been away from the office quite long enough to go to the bank with the cheque, or to send it and secure the money. Roland Yorke, taking French leave,

had stayed a good hour and a quarter at his dinner, having departed for it at a quarter past one. Mr. Brown had been out on business for the house from one till half-past two ; and Mr. Hurst, who went to the stamp office, was away nearly as long. In point of fact, the chief office-keeper had been little Jenner, who came back from dinner at half-past one.

“ And now,” said the detective, after putting up the pocket-book, in which he had pencilled various of the above items of intelligence, “ I should like to get a look at this desk of yours, Mr. Bede Greatorex.”

Bede led the way to his room and shut himself in with the detective. While apparently taking no notice whatever of the questions put to his clerks, keeping his head bent over some papers as if his very life depended on their perusal, he had in reality listened keenly to the answers of all. Handing over the key of his table-desk, he allowed the officer to examine it at will, and waited. He then sat down in his own handsome chair of green patent leather and motioned the other to a seat opposite.

“ Mr. Butterby, I do not wish any further stir made in this business.”

Had Mr. Butterby received a cannon-ball on his head he could scarcely have experienced

a greater shock of surprise, and for once made no reply. Bede Greatorex calmly repeated his injunction, in answer to the perplexed gaze cast on him. He wished nothing more done in the matter.

“What on earth for?” cried Mr. Butterby.

“I shall have to repose some confidence in you,” pursued Mr. Bede Greatorex. “It will be safe, I presume?”

Butterby quite laughed at the question. Safe! With him! It certainly would be. If the world only knew the secrets he held in his bosom!

“And yet I can but trust you partially,” resumed Bede Greatorex. “Not for my own sake; I have nothing to conceal, and should like things fully investigated; but for the sake of my father and family generally. Up to early post-time this morning I was more anxious for Jelf, that he might take the loss in hand, than ever my father was.”

Bede Greatorex paused. But there came no answering remark from his attentive listener, and he went on again.

“I received a private note by this morning’s post which altered the aspect of things, and gave me a clue to the real taker of the cheque. Only a very faint clue: a suspicion rather; and, that, vague and uncertain: but enough

to cause me, in the doubt, to let the matter drop. In fact there is no choice left for me. We must put up with the loss of the money."

Mr. Butterby sat with his hands on his knees, a favourite attitude of his; his head bent a little forwards, his eyes fixed on the speaker.

"I don't quite take you, Mr. Greatorex," said he. "You must speak out more plainly."

Bede Greatorex paused in hesitation. This communication was distasteful, however necessary he might deem it, and he felt afraid of letting a dangerous word slip inadvertently.

"The letter was obscure," he slowly said, "but, if I understand it aright, the proceeds of the cheque have found their way into the hands of one whom neither my father nor I would prosecute. To do so would bring great pain upon us both, perhaps injury. The pain to my father would be such that I dare not show him the letter, or tell him I have received it. For his sake, Mr. Butterby, you and I must both hush the matter up."

Mr. Butterby felt very much at sea. A silent man by nature and habit, he sat still yet, and listened for more.

"There will be no difficulty, I presume?"

"Let us understand each other, sir. If I take your meaning correctly, it is this. Some-

body is mixed up in the affair whose name it won't do to bring to light. One of the family, I suppose?"

Mr. Butterby had to wait for an answer. Bede Greatorex paused ere he gave it.

"If not an actual member of the family, it is one so nearly connected with it, that he may almost be called such."

"It's a man, then?"

"It is a man. Will you work with me in this, so as to keep suspicion from my father? Tacitly let him think you are doing what you can to investigate the affair. When no result is brought forth, he will suppose you have been unsuccessful."

"Of course, sir, if you tell me I am not to go on with it, why I won't, and it is at an end. Law bless me! Lots of things are put into our hands one day; and, the next, the family comes and says, Hush 'em up."

"So far good, Mr. Butterby. But now, I wish you, for my own satisfaction, to make some private investigation into it. Quite secretly, you understand: and if you can learn anything as to the thief, bring the news quietly to me."

Mr. Butterby thought this was about as complete a contradiction to what had gone before as it had been ever his lot to hear. He

took refuge in his silent gaze and waited. Bede Greatorex put his elbow on the table and his hand to his head as he spoke.

“If I were able to confide to you the whole case, Mr. Butterby, you would see how entirely it is encompassed with doubts and difficulties. I have reason to fancy that the purloiner of the cheque out of this desk must have been one of the clerks in my room. I think this for two reasons ; one is, that I don’t see how anybody else could have had access to it.”

“But, sir, you stood it out to their faces just now that you did *not* suspect them.”

“Because it will not do for them to know that I do. I assure you, Mr. Butterby, this is a most delicate and dangerous affair. I wish to my heart it had never happened.”

“Do you mean that the clerk, in taking it—if he did take it—was acting as the agent of some other party ?”

Bede Greatorex nodded. “Yes, only that.”

“But *that’s* enough to transport him, you know,” cried Butterby, slightly losing the drift of the argument.

“If we could bring him to book, yes. But that must not be done. I *don’t* see who else it could have been,” added Bede, communing

with himself rather than addressing Mr. Butterby ; and his face wore a strangely perplexed look.

“ Could any of the household—the maid-servants, for instance—get into this here room ? ” asked Mr. Butterby.

“ There’s not one of them would dare to risk it in the day-time. They are in the other house. No, no ; I fear we must look to one of the young men in the next room.”

Mr. Butterby nodded with satisfaction : matters seemed to be taking a more reasonable turn.

“ Let’s see ; there’s four of them,” he began, beginning to tell the clerks off on his fingers. “ The manager, Brown, confidential, you said, I think——”

“ I did not say confidential,” interrupted Bede Greatorex. “ I said we placed great confidence in him. There’s a distinction, Mr. Butterby.”

“ Of course. Then there’s the little man, Jenner ; and the others, Hurst and Yorke. Have you any doubt yourself as to any one of them ? ” quickly asked Mr. Butterby, looking full at the lawyer.

Bede Greatorex hesitated. “ I cannot say I have. It would be so wrong, you know, to cast a doubt on either, when there is not suf-

ficient cause ; nothing but what may be a passing, foundationless fancy."

" Speak out, Mr. Bede Greatorex. It's all in the day's work. If there is really nothing, it won't hurt him ; if there is, I may be able to follow it up. Perhaps it's one of the two gentlemen ?"

" If it be any one of the four. Mr. Hurst."

The detective so far forgot his good manners as to break into a low whistle.

" Mr. Hurst ! or Mr. Yorke, do you mean ?" he cried, in his surprise.

" Not Mr. Yorke, certainly. Why should you think of him ?"

" Oh, for nothing," carelessly answered Butterby. " Hurst seems an upright young man, sir."

" It is so trifling a doubt I have of him, the lifting of a straw, as may be said, that I should be sorry to think he is not upright. Still, I have reason for deciding that he is the most likely, of the four, for doubt to attach to."

At that moment, the gentleman in question interrupted them—Josiah Hurst ; bringing a message to Mr. Bede Greatorex. An important client was waiting to see him. Mr. Butterby took a more curious look at the young man's countenance than he had ever done in the old days at Helstonleigh.

"The lawyer's wrong," thought he to himself. "He is no thiever of cheques, he isn't."

"I shall be at liberty in one minute, Mr. Hurst. Shut the door. You understand?" he added in a low tone to the detective, as they stood up together in parting. "All that I have said to you must be kept secret; doubly secret from my father. He must suppose you at work, investigating; whereas, in point of fact, *the thing must drop*. Only, if you can gain any private information, bring it to me."

Mr. Butterby answered by one of his emphatic nods. "You see there's nothing come up yet about that other thing," he said.

"What other thing?"

"The death of Mr. Ollivera."

"And not likely to," returned Bede Greatorex. "That was over and done with at the time."

"Just my opinion," said the detective. "Jenner was his clerk in chambers."

"Yes. A faithful little fellow."

"Looks it. Who's the other one—Mr. Brown?"

"I can only tell you that he is Mr. Brown; I know nothing of his family. We have had him three or four years."

“ Had a good character with him, I suppose ?
Knew where he’d been, and all that ? ”

“ Undoubtedly. My father is particular.
Why do you ask ? ”

“ Only because he is the only one in your
room that I don’t know something of. Good
morning, Mr. Bede Greatorex.”

Bede shut the door, and Mr. Butterby
walked away, observing things indoors and
out with a keen eye, while he ruminated on
what he had heard. Sundry reports, con-
nected with the domestic life of Bede Great-
orex, were familiar to his comprehensive
ears.

“ It’s a rum go, this,” quoth he, making his
comments. “ He meant his wife, he did ; I’d
a great mind to say so. Hush it up ? of course
they must. And Madam keeps the forty-four
pounds. But now—does he suspect it might
have been one of the clerks helped her to it,
or was it only a genteel way of stopping my
questions as to how the ‘member of the family’
could have got indoors to the desk ? She
grabbed his key, she did, and took out the
cheque herself : leastways I should say so.
Stop a bit, though. Who cashed it at the
bank ? Perhaps one of ‘em did help her.
‘Twasn’t Hurst, I know ; nor little Jenner,
either. Don’t think it was young Yorke, in

spite of that old affair at Galloway's. T'other, Brown, I don't know. Any way," concluded Mr. Butterby, his thoughts recurring to Bede Greatorex, and his wife, "he has got his torment in her ; and he shows it. Never saw a man so altered in all my life : looks, spirits, manners: it's just as though there was a blight upon him."

That the presence of the police-agent in the office had not been agreeable to the clerks, will be readily understood. It had to be accepted for an evil ; as other evils must be for which there is no help. Roland Yorke felt inclined to resent it openly, and thought the fates were against him still, as they had been at Port Natal. What with that unlucky question of Hurst's and the appearance of Butterby on the scene, both recalling the miserable escapade of years ago that he would give all the world to forget, Roland, alike hot-headed and hot-hearted, was in a state of mind to do any mad thing that came uppermost. And the morning wore away.

"Why don't you go to dinner, Mr. Yorke ?"

The question came from the manager. Roland in his perplexity of mind and feelings, had unconsciously let the usual time slip by. Catching up his hat, he tore through the street at speed until he reached the bank, into which he went with a burst.

“I want to see one of the principals.”

What with the haste, the imperative demand, and the imposing stature and air, Roland was at once attended to, and a gentleman, nearly as little as Jenner, came forward.

“Look here,” said Roland. “Just you bring me face to face with the fellow who cashed that cheque yesterday. The clerk, you know.”

“Which cheque?” came the very natural question from the little gentleman, as he gazed at the applicant.

“The one there’s all this shindy over at Greatorex and Greatorex’s. Drawn out in favour of old Dick Yorke.”

Of course it was not precisely the way to go about things. Before Roland’s request was complied with, a little information was requested as to what his business might be, and who he was.

“I am Mr. Roland Yorke.”

“Any relation to Sir Richard Yorke?”

“His nephew by blood; none at all by friendliness. Old Dick—but never mind him now. If you’ll let me see the clerk, sir, you will hear what I want with him.”

The clerk, standing at elbow behind the counter, had heard the colloquy. Roland dashed up to him so impulsively that the little gentleman could with difficulty keep pace.

"Now, then," began Roland to the wondering clerk, "look at me—look well. Am I the man who presented that cheque yesterday?"

"No, sir, certainly not," was the clerk's reply. "There's not the least resemblance."

"Very good," said Roland, a little calming down from his fierceness. "I thought it well to come and let you see me; that's all."

"But why so?" asked the principal, thinking Sir Richard Yorke's nephew, though a fine man, must be rather an eccentric one.

"Why! why, because I am in Bede Greatorex's office, and we've had a policeman amongst us this morning, looking us up. They say the cheque was brought here by a tall fellow with black whiskers. As that description applies to me, and to none of the others, I thought I'd come and let you see me. That's all. Good morning."

Dashing out in the same commotion that he had entered, Roland, still neglecting his dinner, went skimming back to the house of Greatorex and Greatorex. Not to enter the office, but to pay a visit to Mrs. Bede's side of it.

Not very long before this hour, Mr. Bede Greatorex, all the cares of his business on his shoulders, not the least of them (taking it in all its relations) being the new one connected with the abstracted cheque, went up stairs for

luncheon and a few minutes' relaxation. He found his wife full of *her* cares. Mrs. Bede Greatorex had cards out for that afternoon, bidding the great world to a Kettle-drum; and she was calculating what quantity of ices and strawberries to order in, with sundry other momentous questions.

The rooms were turned upside-down. A vast crowd was expected, and small articles of impeding furniture, holding fragile ornaments, were being put out of the way, lest they should come to grief in the turmoil.

"Yes, that quantity of ice will be sufficient; and be sure take care that you have an abundance of strawberries," concluded Mrs. Bede Greatorex to the attendant, who had been receiving her orders. "Chocolate? Of course. Where's the use of asking senseless questions? Bede," she added, seeing her husband standing there, "I know how you detest the smell of chocolate, saying it makes you as sick as a dog, and brings on headaches; but I cannot dispense with it in my rooms. Other people give it, and so must I."

"Give what you like," he said wearily. "What is it you are going to hold? A ball?"

"A ball in the afternoon! Well done, Bede! It's a drum."

"The house is never free from disturbance,

Louisa," he rejoined, as a man pushed by with a table.

" You should let me live away from it. And then you'd not smell the chocolate. And the doors would not be impeded for ever with carriages, as you grumble they are. With a house in Hyde Park——"

" Hush!" said Bede in a whisper. " What did I tell you the other day?—That our expenses are so large, I could not live elsewhere if I would. Don't wear me out with this everlasting theme, Louisa."

It was not precisely the hearth for a man, oppressed with the world's troubles, to find refuge in; neither was she the wife. Bede sighed in very weariness, and turned to go away, thinking how welcome to him, if he could but get transplanted to it, would be the corner of some far-off desert, never before trodden by the foot of man.

A great noise on the stairs, as if a coach-and-six were coming up in fierce commotion, followed by a smart knocking at the room door. Bede turned to escape, thinking it might possibly be the advance guard of the Drum. Nobody but Mr. Roland Yorke. And Roland (who had come up on a vain search after Miss Channing) seeing his master there, at once began to tell of where he had just

been and for what purpose. To keep his own counsel on any matter whatever, would have been extremely difficult to Roland.

"It is said, you know, Mr. Bede Greatorex, that the man, who cashed the cheque and got the money, was a tall fellow with black whiskers ; so I thought it well to go and show myself. I am tall," drawing up his head ; "I've got black whiskers," pushing one side forward with his hand ; "and nobody else in your room answered to the description."

"It was very unnecessary, Mr. Yorke. You were in Port Natal."

"In Port Natal !" echoed Roland, staring. "What has Port Natal to do with this ?"

Bede Greatorex slightly laughed. In his self-absorption, he had suffered his mind to run on other things.

"As to unnecessary—I don't think so, after what that ill-natured Hurst said. And perhaps you'd not, sir, if you knew all," added simple Roland, thinking of Mr. Galloway's bank-note. "Any way, I have been to the bank to show myself."

"What did the bank say to you ?" questioned Bede Greatorex, his tone one of light jest.

"The bank said I was not in the least like the fellow ; he was tall, but not as tall as me, and they are nearly sure he had a beard as well as whiskers. I thought I'd tell you, sir."

Mrs. Bede Greatorex, listening to this with curious ears, enquired what the trouble was, and heard for the first time of the loss of the cheque, the probable loss of the forty-four pounds. Had Mr. Butterby been present to mark her surprise, he might have put away his opinion that she was the recipient alluded to by Bede Greatorex, and perhaps have mentally begged her pardon for the mistaken thought.

"Will you come to my kettle-drum, Mr. Roland?"

"No, I won't," said Roland. "Thank you all the same," he added a minute after, as if to atone for the bluntness of the reply. "I've been put out to-day uncommonly, Mrs. Bede Greatorex; and when a fellow is, he does not care for drums and kettles."

However, when the Kettle-drum was in full swing about five o'clock in the afternoon, and the stairs were crowded with talkers and trains, Roland, thinking better of it, elbowed his way up amidst. People who did not know him, thought he must be from the Court at least; the Lord Chamberlain, or some such great man, for Roland had a way of holding his own and tacitly asserting himself, like nobody else. He caught sight of Gerald, who averted his head at once; he saw Mrs. Hamish Channing, and she was the only guest he talked to. Roland was again looking for

Annabel. He found her presently in the refreshment room, seeing that Miss Jane did not make herself ill with strawberries and cream.

Into her ear, very much as though it had been a rock of refuge, Roland confided his wrongs: Mr. Hurst's semi-accusation of him in regard to the loss, his errand to the bank, and in short all the events of the morning.

"I couldn't have done it by *him*," said Roland. "Had he made a fool of himself when he was young and wicked, I could no more have flung it in his teeth in after-years, to twist his feelings, than I could twist yours, Annabel. When I've been repenting of the mad act ever since; never going to my bed at night or rising in the morning, without thinking of it and—dashing it: but I was going to say another word: and hoping and planning how best to recompense every soul that suffered by it! It was too bad of him."

"Yes it was," warmly answered Annabel, her cheeks flushing with the earnestness of her sympathy. "Roland, I never liked that Josiah Hurst."

END OF VOL. I.

